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COMICS scene

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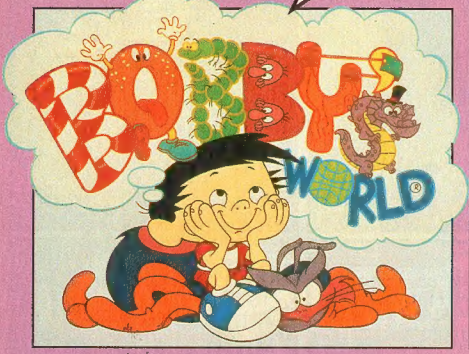


Three *Bobby's World* excursions are already out on video. Each volume includes two episodes.

Bobby's World Photos: Fox Children's Network

Bobby's Universe

Who's Number One on Saturday Morning? It's not *X-Men*. It's not *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*. It's not even *Bugs Bunny* or the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. The most popular animated show on Saturday morning is—*Bobby's World*! Yes, comedian Howie Mandel's creation has been scoring as high as 37 percent of the audience under age 18, achieving its highest-ever rating, 11.6, on March 26. For three consecutive weeks—March 26, April 2 and 9—it has outrated *every* Saturday morning cartoon.

How can this be? The show's producer, Gary Conrad, ventures an answer, "The success of *Bobby's World* starts with having a charming main character, terrific production values and a great creative team behind the show—and of course, having *Power Rangers* as a lead-in has not hurt."

Every week, the live-action Howie Mandel introduces his animated four-year-old alter-ego, Bobby Generic, whose vivid imagination helps him cope with the problems of growing up. Mandel also voices Bobby's dad; Gail Matthius voices Mom; Charity James does 14-year-old sister Kelly; Kevin Michaels voices bullying brother Derek; Frank Welker woofs for lovable sheepdog Roger; Susan Tolsky voices obese Aunt Ruth; and Gary Owens speaks as Bobby's favorite superhero, Captain Squash. Fox renewed the series for a fifth season and is moving it to weekday mornings this fall. *Bobby's World* is produced by Film Roman, the makers of *Garfield & Friends*, *The Simpsons*, *Mighty Max* and *Cro*.

CBS/Fox Video has released three *Bobby's World* videos; each includes two episodes. Volume 1 has two first season episodes: "Uncle Ted's Excellent Adventure" and "A Visit to Aunt Ruth." Volume 2: "The Wonder Days: Bobby's Big Move" (third season) and "Bobby's Big Broadcast" (first season). Volume 3: "Swim by Me" (third) and "Jets, Choo-Choos and Cars" (fourth). The videos retail for $12.95.

The Kroyers Join Warner Bros.: Last issue, COMICS SCENE reported the formation of Warner Bros.' new Feature Animation division. In early May, they recruited some major talent: Bill and Sue Kroyer, whose Kroyer Films Studio produced the 1992 ecological feature *FernGully: The Last Rainforest*. The Kroyers have signed a two-year deal to develop and produce feature animation. Among their proposals: *King Tut* and *The Snow Queen*.

The Kroyers are known in the industry for their innovative work in animation, blending computer-generated imagery with traditional cel animation. They met and married while working at Disney, and later formed their own company. The Kroyers' work includes the Oscar-nominated *Technological Threat* (1988); *Computer Warriors* (1991), a direct-to-video for Mattel in collaboration with *Robotech*'s Carl Macek; title sequences for *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*, Jim Henson's *Labyrinth*, *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation* and *Son of the Pink Panther* (1993); and the computer-generated backgrounds for the still-unreleased Bugs Bunny short "Blooper Bunny."

Their studio's final projects are a 30-minute Christmas special for Rabbit Ears, *The Lion and the Lamb*, plus assorted video games for Activision (*Pitfall Harry*) and Electronic Arts (*Wizard of Oz*). They're also collaborating with legendary animation director Chuck Jones on his first CD-ROM game, *Peter and the Wolf*, in conjunction with composer George Daugherty, who is famous for his "Bugs Bunny on Broadway" concerts.

Bluth Moves His Garden to the Desert: Don Bluth has survived numerous bankruptcies, but like a phoenix, he keeps rising from the ashes. In 1986, when he moved his operations to Dublin, Ireland, he occupied a building called Phoenix House. In May, Bluth and his partner, Gary Goldman, returned to the States. At presstime, they haven't decided where to relocate, but one possible site may be—Phoenix.

In his farewell address to his Irish staff, Bluth reportedly said he was leaving because, "I can't chew with someone else's teeth."

Essentially, Bluth and Goldman no longer controlled their Irish studio, which was—and is now—managed by Hong Kong-based Media Assets, now owned by Rupert Murdoch (CS #44). Then, the filmmakers were offered a deal by 20th Century Fox: $100 million to make five animated features for Fox's new family film division, under the stewardship of president John Matoian and executive VP Chris Meledandri. Fox, it seems, wants to compete in the animation arena occupied by Disney, Turner/Hanna-Barbera, Amblin/Universal, Rich Entertainment and Warner Bros. Bluth and Goldman offered 12 projects to Fox, with one targeted for Christmas 1996. Meanwhile, the Irish studio is up for sale, while continuing to work on *The Pebble and the Penguin*.

Warner Bros. released Bluth's latest film, *Thumbelina*, which grossed a disappointing $10.5 million after six weeks. It's now on home video.

Goldman told *Daily Variety*, "We've always known how to put an animation crew together and tell a story, but our problem has been a lack of expertise to market the films to their utmost potential. With [Fox president] Bill Mechanic and his very creative marketing team, we no longer have to worry about that being the case."

Time will tell.

My Neighbor, Totoro comes to Home Video—In English! At last, Americans can buy writer/director Hayao Miyazaki's masterpiece. Made in 1988, *My Neighbor, Totoro* (*Tonari no Totoro*) is a charming tale of a Japanese family moving to the countryside and meeting a group of whimsical creatures called Totoros.

Streamline Pictures dubbed *Totoro* in 1989. Producer Carl Macek adapted the film, and Greg Snegoff wrote the ADR dialogue. In the American cast, Cheryl Chase (Angelica in *Rugrats*) delivers an amazing performance as an inquisitive four-year-old Mei, who discovers and befriends Totoro. Lisa Michaelson voices her older sister Satsuki (Michaelson also voiced Kiki in *Kiki's Delivery Service*, but was killed by a drunk driver shortly after recording). Their father is voiced by Snegoff, a versatile voice artist heard in many Macek-translated productions such as *Robotech*, *Lensman* and *Wicked City*.

The English-language version was first shown at the 20th Annual San Diego Comics Convention in 1989 and on JAL Airlines in winter 1989-90. Last May, Troma, Inc. distributed the film in a limited release, to limited success. CBS/Fox Video is releasing it on cassette July 26, with a $22.98 suggested retail, and a laserdisc edition tentatively priced at $29.98. Alas, the laserdisc will not be bilingual, with the original Japanese dialogue.

Robotech Art: Courtesy Streamline Pictures

Streamline Pictures has issued new editions from the *Robotech Perfect Collection* featuring English and Japanese versions from *Southern Cross*, *Macross* and *Mospeada*.

More from Miyazaki: This July, Toho is unleashing the latest feature from Miyazaki's Studio Ghibli: *Heisei Tanuki War Ponpoko* (*Present-Day Tanuki War Goes 'Tum-Tum'*). In the movie, a society of intelligent *tanuki* (Japanese raccoons) has to contend with human civilization encroaching on their territory. Miyazaki conceived the story, which was written and directed by his mentor, Isao Takahata (noted for *Only Yesterday* and *Grave of the Fireflies*).

Miyazaki finally completed his epic *manga* series, *Nausicaä in the Valley of Wind*, in the March issue of *Animage*. He's now concentrating on his next animated feature, *The Monster Princess*—his version of *Beauty and the Beast*. When Miyazaki designed the Beast in 1980, its head closely resembled the Cat Bus' head in his later film, *Totoro*.

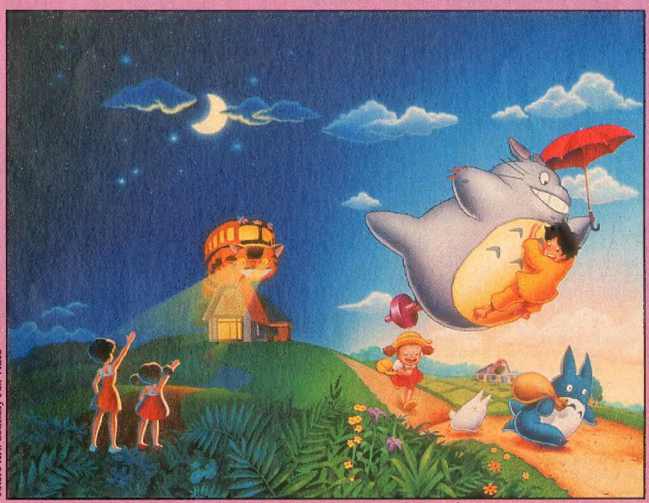
Japanimation Gets Streamlined: After directing and writing his first feature, *Castle of Cagliostro* (1979), Miyazaki did the same for two episodes from the second *Lupin III* TV series, under the pseudonym "Telecom." Streamline Pictures now has these episodes translated and available on home video for $14.95 each, in a series called *Tales of the Wolf*. In Volume 1, "Albatross: Wings of Death" (Episode #145), Lupin tackles a nuclear threat from an enormous sea plane. In Volume 2, "Aloha, Lupin" (Episode #155), the daring thief contends with impostors who employ a giant, flying robot to commit robberies. Miyazaki used the same design for the flying robots in his 1986 masterpiece, *Lapüta: Castle in the Sky*. Streamline also has *The Castle of Cagliostro* available for $29.95. Yours truly has the honor of speaking the first line in that film: "There they are! Get 'em!"

Currently, Streamline president Macek is adapting the first *Lupin III* theatrical feature, *The Mystery of Mamo*.

Streamline has recently issued new editions from the *Robotech Perfect Collection*, featuring both English translation and Japanese versions from *Macross* (volumes 2 and 3), *Southern Cross* (volumes 2 and 3) and *Mospeada* (volumes 2 and 3). Each cassette sells for $19.95. Also, the 60-minute OVA, *Dirty Pair: The Flight 005 Conspiracy* (Bandai, 1990), is out for $29.95.

Central Park Media Adds Animeigo to its distribution lineup of Japanese animation product, which includes U.S. Manga Corps, Anime 18, Viz Communications, A.D. Vision, U.S. Rendition and The Right Stuf.

This month, Anime 18 re-


Totoro Art: Courtesy Fox Video

Look for *My Neighbor Totoro*, dubbed into English, on video this month.

Central Park Media is distributing lotsa Japanese animation entries including *Gall Force 3: Stardust War* (from U.S. Manga Corps).

leases *Urotsukidoji: Legend of the Overfiend* on CD-ROM for $49.95. Videocassette and laserdisc versions were released late last year. *Overfiend* is a brutally graphic supernatural tale that's absolutely *not* for children under 17.

In June, A.D. Vision released *Plastic Little: The Adventures of Captain Tita* (subtitled), about a 17-year-old tomboy ship captain who sells exotic life forms from the tourist planet Yietta. Tita finds herself involved in a plot to deny Yietta its independence from the galactic Federation. The 45-minute video retails for $34.95. It's for mature audiences only.

Also from A.D. Vision: *GUY: Double Target*, containing two episodes: "Awakening of the Devil" and "Second Target." Guy is a spacefaring mercenary who travels with "a homicidal red-headed sex bomb" named Raina. The 80-minute English-dubbed video will be released this month, available for $39.95.

U.S. Manga Corps has released subtitled editions of *Gall Force 3: Stardust War* (60 minutes) and *Project A-ko #4: Final* (59 minutes), priced at $29.95 each. The unit cost is cheaper if you purchase them in a prepack. The *Gall Force* trilogy is listed at $89.95; $104.95 if purchased separately. The prepack of *Project A-ko 3: Cinderella Rhapsody* and *Project A-ko 4: Final* lists for $49.95; $59.95 if purchased separately.

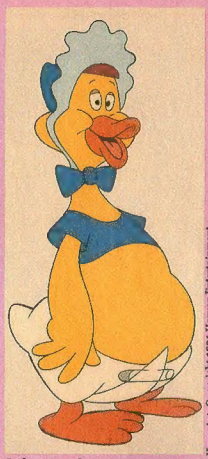
What's *Your* Favorite Cartoon? Now's the time to make your vote count for the 22nd Annual Annie Awards, sponsored by ASIFA-Hollywood, the local chapter of the International Animated Film Society. Members will be voting on animated productions completed between August 1, 1993 and July 31, 1994. To vote, you must join ASIFA by August 1, so you don't have much time. For more information, contact Antran Manoogian, President; The International Animated Film Society, ASIFA-Hollywood, 725 S. Victory Blvd., Burbank, CA 91502. Phone (818) 842-8330.

"Duh, You're the Fox, and You're Trying to Kill Me!" Yes, the mean ol' Fox is back in *The Baby Huey Show*, where he tries to eat the dim-witted duckling in two of the 13 new episodes. The Fox is voiced by Billy West, the voice of Stimpson J. Cat, Doug and post-Kricfalusi Ren Höek. Also out to get Huey is The Boogeyman, voiced by Will Ryan (CS #31). Baby Huey's voice belongs to the *original* actor who portrayed him 40 years ago: Sid Raymond, now a retiree living in Florida.

Animator Marty Taras created Baby Huey in 1949. The character first appeared in a *Little Audrey* comic book. Paramount Pictures released the first animated Huey, "Quack-a-Doodle-Doo," in 1950, with 11 more shorts produced in that decade.

Carbunkle Cartoons of Vancouver, Canada, is producing 13 new shorts for Harvey Famous Studios to be syndicated this fall. Each show contains three shorts: a new *Huey* story, a *Casper* (five total) or *Herman & Katnip* cartoon (nine total), followed by a classic *Huey* short. Creative consultant Jerry Beck—an authority on Golden Age animation—has "strategically mapped out" the scheduling of the programs, to show cartoons with similar themes: For example, a Casper "True Boo" is paired with the classic *Huey*, "Jumping for Toy," for the Christmas-themed final show. Beck selected the "oddest" Casper story, "Fright from Wrong," "odd," because the Friendly Ghost behaves like a devil. For you genie fans, Beck selected "Casper Genie" to air on the first show.

Although "Quack-a-Doodle-Doo" is in public domain, acquiring a crisp print from NTA (Republic) costs $25,000. Harvey may substitute another Famous


Huey Art Copyright 1994 Harvey Entertainment

Baby Huey has 13 new adventures in the works.

short, "Cock-a-Doodle Dino," which features a purple dinosaur.

What Animators Do for You: In feature animation, usually the budgets are large enough to allow for some extraordinary research. Such is the case with Disney. To research *The Lion King*, the studio financed an African safari for six key filmmakers: George Scribner (the film's original director, now on *Fantasia Continued*), Roger Allers (co-director with Rob Minkoff), Lisa Keane (supervising background artist), Chris Sanders (production designer) and Brenda Chapman (head of story). For two weeks, the crew toured through Kenya, visiting Mt. Kilimanjaro, Mt. Kenya and Masai Mara. They drew sketches, took photographs and generally absorbed the feel of the land, the climate and the wildlife. They applied their experiences to *The Lion King*, to add authenticity to the film.

Likewise, Turner Pictures wanted its artists to get a feel for 1940s musicals for its upcoming release, *Cats Don't Dance*. The animators attended *Guys and Dolls* at the Los Angeles Palladium theater. The animators also benefitted from the dancemeister himself, Gene Kelly, who occasionally visited the Hollywood studio to render advice and tap-dancing lessons.

Less extravagant—but no less dependent on visual references—is Don Bluth. For *A Troll in Central Park*, *Thumbelina* and *The Pebble and the Penguin*, he videotaped actors performing the scenes. Frame-by-frame photostats were made from the tape, and registered on animation paper. Animators would utilize the actors' poses, rendering them as cartoon figures—be they humans like Thumbelina, or a chorus of dancing flowers in *Troll*.

For *Penguin*, animators were instructed to watch Charlie Chaplin films, to transfer the Little Tramp's shuffles to the character of Hubie, a shy, stuttering penguin (voiced by Martin Short) and the story's hero. Bluth also wanted the animators to reference videos of actors in penguin costume, an idea the animators balked at. Ultimately, the costumes were dropped but the Irish animators still had to rely on actors mimicking penguins. Bluth's animators in Burbank had to coax the studio to allow a trip to San Diego's Sea World, to study *real* penguins.

—*Bob Miller*

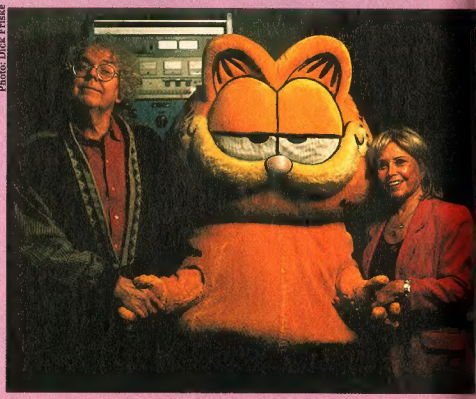


Photo: Dick Friske

Vocal legends Stan Freberg (Sidney the Pink Dinosaur) and June Foray (Jon's various gal pals) are part of *Garfield & Friends* this fall.

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Interviews: Co-creator Michael Piller, designer Herman Zimmerman, director Paul Lynch. Synopses from "Past Prologue" to "Q-Less." $7

ISSUE #4
All-synopsis issue, completing first season, from "Dax" to "In the Hands of the Prophets." $7

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All synopsis issue, "Rules of Acquisition" to "Paradise." Posters: Visitor, Auberjonois, El Fadil and the cast. $7

ISSUE #8
Interviews: Writer Fred Rappaport. Synopses. Posters: Meaney, Brooks, Farrell, Shimerman.
***Available: July.* $7**

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WORD BALLOONS

Loose Connections

Obsessed as we are with matters of continuity and coherent universes, it seems that we seldom consider just how well everyone in comics knows everyone else. Or knows someone who knows someone.

At a convention attended only by heroes—no pros, no fans, no vengeful supervillains—it wouldn't be difficult to find some old chum to introduce you to whichever protagonist you hadn't encountered yet in some inter- or intra-company crossover ("Kid Marmoset, have you met X-Acto Man?") Every hero *knows* every other hero—if not personally, then by name, by reputation or by previous relationship with someone else. In short, everyone's related.

I'm thinking, of course, of John Guare's award-winning play (and later film) *Six Degrees of Separation*. Guare's conceit—which I consider mostly true—is that it takes no more than six, sometimes less, relationships for any two people on this planet to be connected. Each degree could be an "acquaintanceship," a real friendship or even actual blood relativity (son, daughter, sibling, cousin, etc.). Recounting these relationships is akin, I know, to name-dropping, but let's try a simple one out of media history as an example: (1) Bruce Lee worked with (2) Van Williams in *The Green Hornet*. Williams has been interviewed by COMICS SCENE's (3) Will Murray. Murray was a friend of Shadow creator (4) Walter B. Gibson, whom he also interviewed (CS YEARBOOK #3). Gibson once worked for (5) Harry Houdini, the great escape artist and magician. And, until their camaraderie dissolved due to differing views on spiritualism, Houdini was a pal of (6) Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. So, it follows, there's a *relationship* between Bruce Lee and Harry Houdini, not to mention Lee and Sherlock Holmes' biographer Doyle.

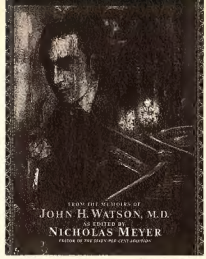
Sure, some contact points could be considered rather tenuous and using the celebrated to make the connections work is an easy (though fascinating) path to follow.

You can always make up your own, relying on pop culture history. Take actress Paulette Goddard (whom I recently read a biography of). She was married to Charlie Chaplin, Burgess Meredith and *All Quiet on the Western Front* novelist Erich Maria Remarque. She co-starred in films with Bob Hope and Joan Crawford. She knew H.G. Wells. A friend of Douglas Fairbanks Sr. (a memorable movie Zorro), Chaplin was once Stan Laurel's roommate. Meredith (whose autobiography *So Far, So Good* is now out) of course acted with Adam West and Burt Ward in TV's *Batman* and knew Rod Serling thanks to his *Twilight Zone* appearances. Hope knows and knew everyone—the last 8 or 10 U.S. Presidents, Bing Crosby, Brooke Shields. And Shields has dated *Lois & Clark*'s Dean Cain.

Armed with these trivial facts, you *could* connect the dots between Laurel & Hardy and Batman & Robin, between Superman and Zorro, between *The Twilight Zone* and *The Time Machine*, among other possibilities.

As scenarios go, these are really no flimsier than an average comic book plot. And certainly, such coincidental meetings and incidental relationships must play a part in comics fans' affection for crossovers. Don't we secretly—really, more than anything—want everybody to know everybody? In this best of all crossover universes, one could find a connection between almost anyone, the sacred and profane, the best and the brightest.

How? Let's start with Indiana Jones. As recorded on TV and in film, Indy has encountered Al Capone, Eliot Ness, Adolph Hitler, Ernest Hemingway, Pablo Picasso, Lawrence of Arabia and Teddy Roosevelt.



Art: Huni Werner/Norton

Sherlock Holmes is the Bob Hope of pop culture heroes. In writer/director Nicholas Meyer's latest non-fiction chronicle, *The Canary Trainer*, Holmes meets the Phantom of the Opera. Meyer has had his own encounters with H.G. Wells, Jack the Ripper and Spock.

Then, there's the Bob Hope of pop culture heroes—Sherlock Holmes. Assuming that all the novels, movies and comics of the last 20 odd years have some degree of accuracy, Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson have met Teddy Roosevelt, the Martians of H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*, Jack the Ripper (frequently, in conflicting accounts), Sigmund Freud, Harry Houdini, Bram Stoker, Count Dracula (numerous times; Dracula also knows Zorro and Dr. Strange), Gilbert & Sullivan, Fu Manchu, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, the Phantom of the Opera and The Shadow.

Who knows The Shadow? Well, considering past team-ups, at least Doc Savage and Batman.

And Batman? Well-acquainted with everyone in the DC Universe, the Dark Knight (Bruce Wayne) has also dealt with the Hulk, Judge Dredd, Grendel, the Predator (who fought Magnus, Robot Fighter and Aliens) and as of this very month (page 41), the Punisher.

Frank Castle, the Punisher, knows his way around the Marvel Universe, meeting such folks as Spider-Man, Daredevil and Wolverine. And this summer, the Punisher traveled to Riverdale—where he met Archie Andrews.

Archie dates Betty and Veronica. He knows Jughead.

You see the connection? No matter how unlikely, it is possible. *Somebody* could have arranged a double date between Betty and Veronica and Al Capone and Eliot Ness. Or introduced Pablo Picasso and Ernest Hemingway...to Jughead.

Now, *there's* a crossover.

—David McDonnell/Editor

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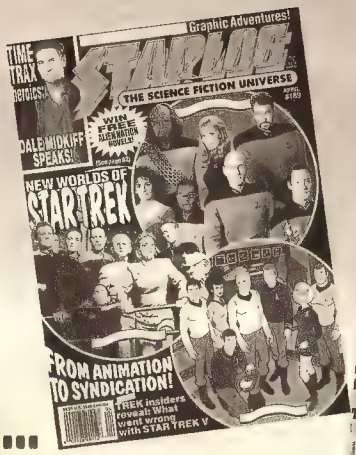
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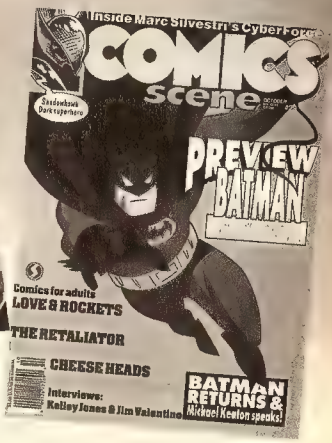

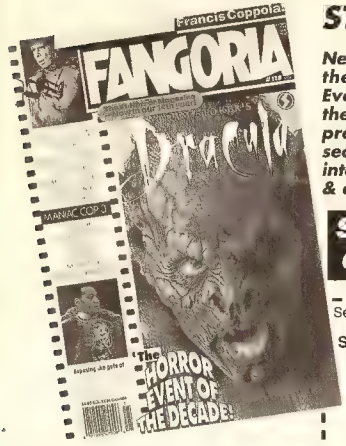

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...Has anyone else besides me noticed the strange reversal of status (for lack of a better word) between the "Big Two" (Marvel and DC) and most of the top independent companies? Is it just me, or do their practices, policies and problems seem to be reversing?

Not too long ago, Marvel and DC were the top dogs in the field of comics, followed closely by a number of "second-string" independents. Then, Valiant and Image popped up and things began to change. Marvel and DC now had some serious competition that they needed to worry about. So, did Marvel and DC increase the quality of their books, to better enable them to compete with the new guys? No, they simply raised prices and increased the output of titles. Which ultimately led to the slight, but still visible, decline in overall quality.

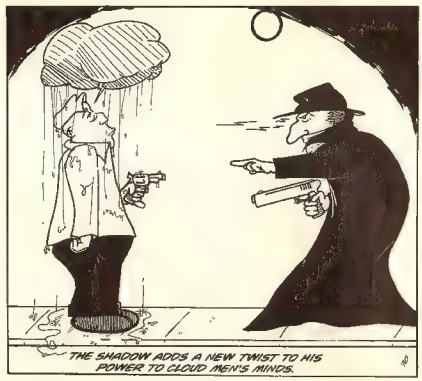
...AND THEN THERE WAS THE YEAR JACK SKELLINGTON BRIEFLY CONSIDERED USURPING YET ANOTHER HOLIDAY...
UMM WELL...
NO, I DON'T THINK SO.
EMILY PENFIELD
Art: Emily Penfield

At the same time, new indies were popping up all over the place, and some of the older guys were starting to make names for themselves in other comic areas besides mainstream superheroics. The indies were starting to cut into the profits of the "Big Two."

Did this startling occurrence prompt Marvel or DC to change policies and practices? Marvel, no, DC, slightly. Marvel just continued to increase output and increase prices, beginning with the so-called Prestige books, while DC changed focus in a number of areas, trying to appeal to a more mature, more intellectual group of readers.

But the indies weren't without problems either. Indies have traditionally been plagued by delays and cancellations, and this has remained true even for the largest indie, Image. But they kept on rolling along, trying their best to eliminate delays, increasing the size of their readership at a fast pace, but increasing their product line at a much slower rate. And they seemed to have decided to keep price increases as irregular as possible.

On the other side of the coin, both Marvel and DC seem to be raising prices very often. It's now routine to pay at the least $1.50 for even a "common" newsstand title! Delays are beginning to become very commonplace for both Marvel and DC, and they continue to increase product line (though in defense of DC, they're trying to bring out different sorts of material to appeal to a wider range of readers).



Art: Michael Stewart

When I looked at these events closely I realized something strange was happening—Marvel and DC were turning into indies, while the indies were striving to become big-time publishers.

Of all the things that are happening, one angers me the most. I don't mind that some of Marvel's and DC's books are late; I don't mind that they continue to increase the number of books they publish on a regular basis; I don't even mind the experiments with different types of books. But I *do* hate the steady increase in cover prices!

I was recently comparing the prices *and* quality of indies to Marvel's and DC's and I was shocked at what I found. Most all of the indies that I read are printed on very slick and glossy paper, have few to no outside advertisements, and look and read as good as any book ever published by the "Big Two," yet the highest I've ever paid for an indie was $2.95 for *Vengeance of Vampirella* #1, which had a gimmick cover. The lowest that I'm paying is $1.95, the price for most of the Image and Ultraverse titles I read, the amount that I'm not forced to pay for the so-called Prestige books from Marvel in which I'm quickly losing interest.

If indies like Dark Horse and Malibu can produce quality titles on quality paper with quality art and stories, but with little or no outside advertisements, at prices ranging from $2.95 and lower, then *why* can't Marvel and DC sell their books at even lower prices since they do have more outside advertising revenue, and don't always use the best paper, or artists, or writers?

I find myself growing dissatisfied with a number of titles from both Marvel and DC, while becoming increasingly interested in new books from Image, Malibu and Dark Horse. If the "Big Two" don't do something soon (and I don't mean more mutant titles), they may find themselves with an ever decreasing portion of the pie. They are already losing artists and writers to independents on a regular basis, so what's next?

Derrick Fannin
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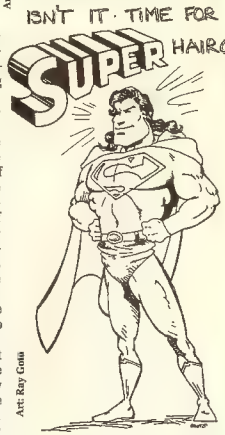
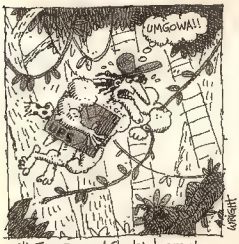


Art: Ray Gotio

...A while back, COMICS SCENE printed a letter of mine concerning comic book movies good and bad. Well, I know there are a few of them that I left off of the *good* list (*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles I*), and the *bad* list (*Dick Tracy*), but one thing's for sure: *The Crow* definitely qualifies for the *good* list. What a unique, visual ride! I was simply mesmerized by this film. All I could think as I watched it was "Wow!" It successfully combines the look of *Batman* and *Blade Runner* with the feel of a *Punisher* story.

It is an enormous shame that Brandon Lee's life was taken on the set, which gives the film (and the filmgoer) an overall feeling of sadness. And the movie's closing line: "People die, buildings burn..." in combination with the tragedy of Lee's death on the set, really makes one question their own mortality.

Who would've ever thought? A comic book movie that *really* makes you think.



With Jane, Boy and Cheetah to support, Tarzan was soon forced to get a regular job.

And also to respond to Lee Solomon's letter in CS #42, concerning the "new Batman" issue. I have to say that I agree with *most* of what he says in that letter, but I was highly agitated by one particular comment he made. The comment being the one about Batman being dark getting "stale and redundant." He went on to say that he "wouldn't mind...if Batman became lighter...[and] developed a sense of humor and cracked jokes." After that, he finished with the statement: "The Batman is my favorite hero." Well, I beg to differ. A Batman who cracks jokes and has a sense of humor *is not* the Batman!! Batman does not laugh or crack jokes because Batman is not happy, he's deeply disturbed by his past. What kind of person would watch his/her parents get brutally murdered in front of them, and then go on to deliver jokes to the same type of people who committed the act?

I realize that the subject was the new Batman, but Solomon's comment appeared to involve the entire Batman world.

The Batman is struggling to prove himself to the city as well as himself. The entire Batman persona was created to strike *fear* into the hearts of criminals, not to make them bust up laughing. Leave the jokes for Plastic Man, the Batman is a very serious character who represents the anger of a scorned childhood.

I'm not saying that the Batman being handed to us in today's comics is *anything* like the real thing, but I would certainly take him over Adam West.

When I see or read *Batman*, I don't want to laugh, that is, unless it is because of the villains. No offense or anything, Lee Solomon, but if it's something "lighter" and a laugh you want, maybe you *would* be better off with *The Partridge Family*.

James Ferace
Ledyard, CT

...I enjoyed your coverage of the cinematic She-Hulk. I have been a devoted fan of *Incredible Hulk* since the show first aired back in 1977. I never missed an episode during the show's original run. I saw Lou Ferrigno as the Hulk before I saw him in the documentary *Pumping Iron*.

As for an actress to play Jen Walters on a regular series, I would suggest Courteney Cox. She has come a long way from playing Michael J. Fox's girl friend on *Family Ties*. I loved her characters in the movies *Cocoon: The Return* and *The Opposite Sex and How to Live With Them*. She seems to have a degree of class that could equal Bill Bixby's and Ken Johnson's.

I can't see Melissa Gilbert in the role, I was never a fan of *Little House on the Prairie*.

The Hulk will always be my favorite show, and a positive outlet for me. As a result, I'm a photo-journalist, I love thinking up settings for the Hulk, and now the She-Hulk, and work out with weights to keep in shape.

Although Bill Bixby is no longer with us in body, maybe he will be with us in spirit.

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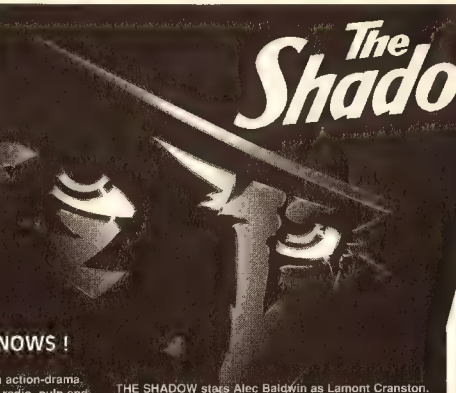

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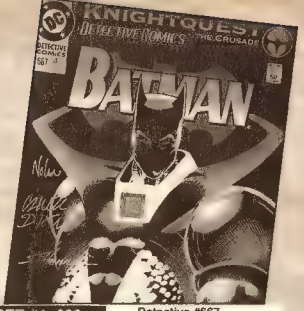

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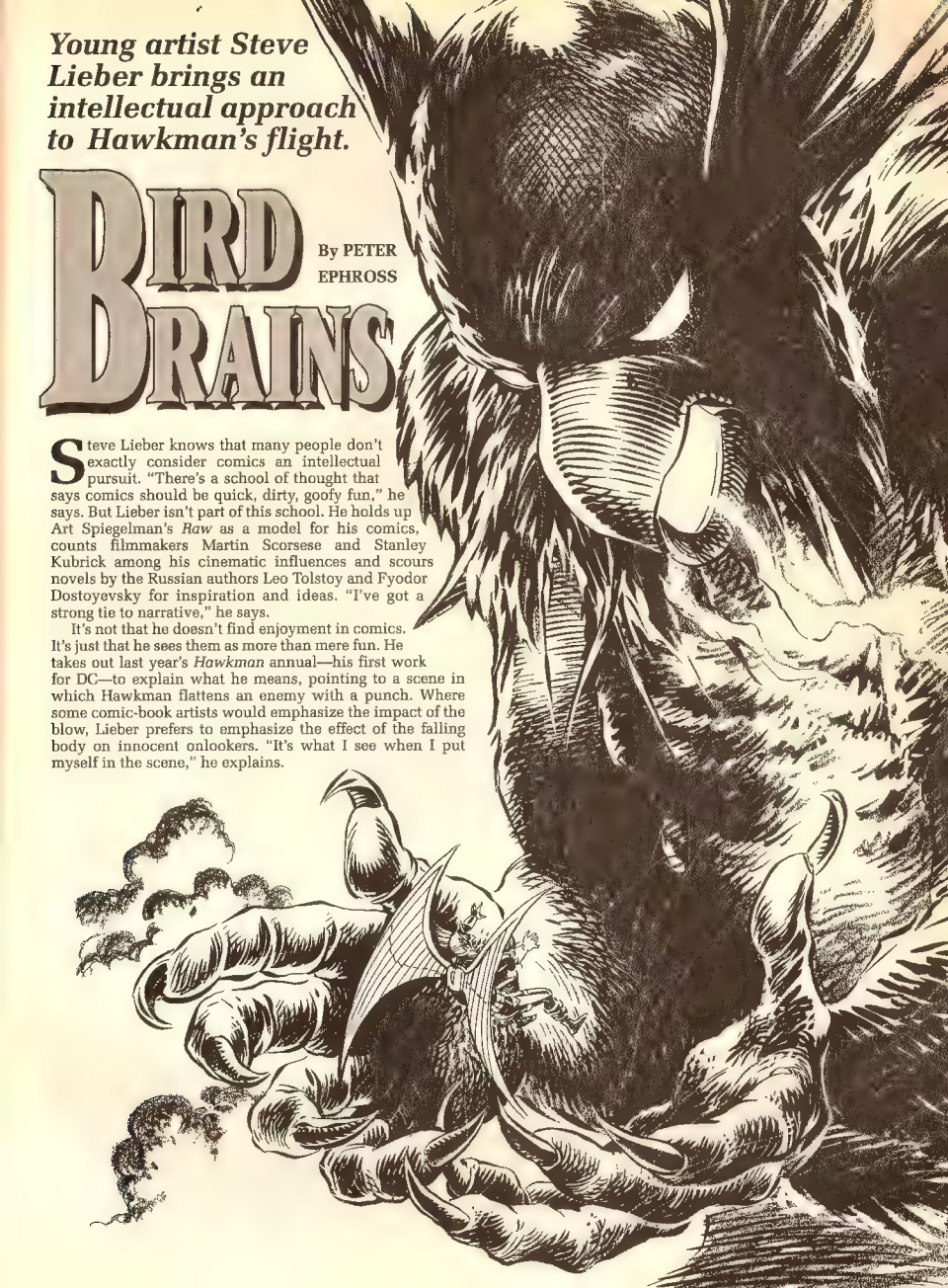
Young artist Steve Lieber brings an intellectual approach to Hawkman's flight.

BIRD BRAINS

By PETER EPHROSS

Steve Lieber knows that many people don't exactly consider comics an intellectual pursuit. "There's a school of thought that says comics should be quick, dirty, goofy fun," he says. But Lieber isn't part of this school. He holds up Art Spiegelman's *Raw* as a model for his comics, counts filmmakers Martin Scorsese and Stanley Kubrick among his cinematic influences and scours novels by the Russian authors Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoyevsky for inspiration and ideas. "I've got a strong tie to narrative," he says.

It's not that he doesn't find enjoyment in comics. It's just that he sees them as more than mere fun. He takes out last year's *Hawkman* annual—his first work for DC—to explain what he means, pointing to a scene in which Hawkman flattens an enemy with a punch. Where some comic-book artists would emphasize the impact of the blow, Lieber prefers to emphasize the effect of the falling body on innocent onlookers. "It's what I see when I put myself in the scene," he explains.



KATAR ?
TIME IS DISINTEGRATING IF I DON'T TRY WE'LL ALL BE ADRIFT IN AN ENDLESS, FORMLESS, ETERNALLY MUTATING PRESENT
I HAVE TO DRAW THE ENTITY TO ME !
I CAN STOP THIS !

Design & Layout: Jim McLarnon

"Steve's unique style will allow him to avoid falling out of fashion when fads change," predicts veteran DC editor Archie Goodwin.

Lieber's reluctance to draw characters with exaggerated proportions and to glorify violence occasionally gets him into trouble. "Steve and I go back and forth on it," says Archie Goodwin, one of Lieber's editors at DC. But in the long run, Goodwin says, Lieber's unique style will allow him to avoid falling out of fashion when fads change. "Steve will *never* have that problem," Goodwin predicts.

The artist's unique style hasn't hindered him so far. In the past year, he has drawn an eight-page story featuring the Falcon for *Marvel Comics Presents*, and an issue in the series on Congressional Medal of Honor winners for Dark Horse. Lieber's *Medal of Honor* issue focused on Desmond Doss, a medic in the Pacific Theater in World War II who earned his medal for rescuing several fellow soldiers off a cliff, exposing himself to enemy fire.

Then, last fall, Lieber got his break—a package from the DC offices that contained instructions on *Hawkman*. Soon, the news became even better, when Lieber learned that William Messner-Loebs was becoming *Hawkman*'s regular writer. Messner-Loebs is known for intelligent, believable dialogue and well-thought-out characters. Currently the writer for *Wonder Woman*, Messner-Loebs has also scripted *Jonny Quest* and *The Flash*.

Lieber has long admired Messner-Loebs' work, and was pleased when he got the assignment. "I lobbied real hard for him," says Lieber. The respect is mutual. Recently, when Messner-Loebs was stumped, he called up Lieber "to pump him for ideas." Their collaboration is made easy not only by mutual respect, but by geography—Messner-Loebs lives only a half-hour from Lieber's current base in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Since both Messner-Loebs and Lieber are interested in pushing the limits of comic books, it isn't surprising to learn that *Hawkman* will probe into social issues. Hawkman has now been established as part-Cherokee, so racism will likely be high on the list of issues explored. But both Lieber and Messner-Loebs are also excited about providing the action for a superhero comic.

Hawkman, explains DC associate editor Jim Spivey, goes back to comics' Golden Age. Originally, Hawkman was an archaeologist named Carter Hall who discovered that he was a reincarnated Egyptian prince. He had the power of flight, and used such traditional weapons as spears. At that time, Hawkman was a member of DC's Justice Society of America.

In the 1960s, Hawkman was revamped and relaunched. He became a policeman from a planet called Thanagar, where they had discovered an anti-gravity metal. Hawkman came to Earth to chase a criminal from Thanagar; he stayed to study police methods on Earth. In the 1960s version, Hawkgirl—later Hawkwoman—became more

All Art: Steve Lieber

"Godspawn," a five-part storyline, brings a new direction for the Birdman of Thanagar, with Steve Lieber supplying the pencils.

Nice birdie, good birdie, don't completely destroy the planet Thanagar and then try to murder our hero on Earth. Oops, too late.

prominent, and Hawkman kept his original weapons. "They didn't want to expose Earth to futuristic weapons," says Spivey.

Then, in 1989, Hawkman was reintroduced once again in a mini-series called *Hawkworld* (CS #8); it was emphasized that he was a renegade policeman from Thanagar with a strong social conscience. "Hawkman believes in the ancient system of justice and democracy because Thanagar ignored such liberties," Spivey notes. At the same time, the character has also gained "a much grittier edge."

This is the Hawkman that Messner-Loebs and Lieber inherit. At the start of "Godspawn," a five-issue series that begins Lieber and Messner-Loebs' collaboration (*Hawkman* #9 is the first installment), a new challenge is created.

"The first thing is that Thanagar is destroyed by a Hawk-God. Through visions, Hawkman realizes that the Hawk-God is on its way to Earth to kill him," explains Spivey. With the Golden Age Hawkman guest-starring, the series will detail Hawkman's preparation for the battle with the mysterious Hawk-God.

There are problems that the new team plans to address. "One of the difficulties of Hawkman of late is that he does have a complex history," says Spivey. For instance, the relationship between Hawkman and Hawkwoman has changed numerous times. "Hawkman and Hawkwoman were once married. For a long time, they practically hated each other's guts. Now we've gotten them back to where they're lovers."

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...THE PAIN!
TOO LATE. CORRUPTION IS COMPLETE. EVERYTHING MUST BURN!
I CAN'T LET YOU DESTROY THIS PLACE, AS YOU DESTROYED THE CITIES OF MY HOMEWORLD!
YOU HAVEN'T THE STRENGTH TO STOP ME, HAWKLING!

All Hawkman Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1994 DC Comics, Inc.

"He needs a reason for being," says Lieber of the new challenges set up for Hawkman. Looks like he also needs a shave.

I'M FLYING AT TOP SPEED, NEARLY STRAIGHT UP. IF THIS DOESN'T ATTRACT MY FRIEND'S ATTENTION, NOTHING WILL!
THE NTH METAL IS STARTING TO HEAT BETWEEN MY SHOULDERS. I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH LONGER I CAN TAKE THIS SPEED.

With two Hawkmen appearing in upcoming issues, this challenge will be even stronger. "Hawkman has been a character who has been defined by his powers. He needs a reason for being. A mission," says Spivey.

Lieber didn't always know that he would be an artist in the comics industry. In the mid-1980s, he entered Penn State to study business, but soon switched to art. "I was floating, like a cork bobbing in the ocean," he recalls. Even switching to a fine arts program didn't help.

He also spent a great deal of time staring at comic books, a habit he began at age nine. In 1987, he decided to turn his interest into a career. Lieber left Penn State and enrolled at the Joe Kubert Comics School in Dover, New Jersey. Lieber's father, a longtime

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THANAGARIAN BLASTER
CHEST PIECE IN COMBAT
LT. WOLF THANAGARIAN "GRAVITY" GLOVE
RT. HEART GLOVE IN PROFILE
CHEST PIECE FINISH
WITH OR LOSE THEIR SHOULDERS AND ARMS
WITH OR LOSE THEIR SHOULDERS AND ARMS
FITTING ON LEFT THIGH ONLY

He's gritty, he's angry, he's not your father's Hawkman. The Winged Wonder has kept the antique weapons but he's also packing heat.

clothing manufacturers' representative, wasn't very happy. "My father said, 'Oh, my God, he's throwing away a business degree,' " Lieber remembers.

But his father failed to take into account what his son was gaining. The Kubert School has two three-year programs, one in animation and one in comics. There are 10 classes a week, each for three hours, ranging from learning elements of comic drawing to commercial illustration. In addition to classes, there are several hours of homework each night. "Drawing, drawing, and more drawing," Lieber recalls.

After graduating in 1990, Lieber returned to his native Pittsburgh and went to work freelancing for advertising agencies. It was challenging, he says, because he worked on tight deadlines. He remembers a typical assignment ruefully. "Steve, we've got a meeting with a client at 2 p.m. tomorrow. We have some ideas, but no one here has the time to draw them up." Since Lieber found the artwork itself unchallenging, it was just a way to make a living. "It was the most tedious garbage imaginable," he says bluntly.

And it wasn't drawing comics. Even as he worked in the advertising industry, Lieber constantly lobbied for comics work. "Good lord, did I pester poor Archie! I sent him in excess of a hundred pages of art samples. I don't know if anybody has been hounded like this short of a divorce lawyer," he says of his calls and packages of work sent to Goodwin.

While Lieber lobbied Goodwin, he began to get work with smaller comic-book publishers. The Chicago-based Now Comics hired him to do an issue of *The Twilight Zone*. Now wanted him to do more work, but failed to pay him promptly. "I finally managed to get paid by making Xeroxes of a job I owed them," Lieber recalls, "and making an 'X' through all the panels."

With Jeffrey Lang, he collaborated on a short story for Dark Horse Comics. Their *Nanny Katie* is "a Mary Poppins figure" who has come to Earth from a planet named Faerie. Katie "releases energy in the world by telling stories to children and captures the energy released by their wonderment for use," Lieber explains. She uses this energy to tame gnome-like creatures who have also fallen to Earth from Faerie, and who have been negatively affected by the Earth's atmosphere. Katie, says Lieber, "tries to keep an eye on things."

Lieber and Lang plan to publish a four-issue, black-and-white *Nanny Katie* mini-series through Cult Press. Since Lieber is both pencilling and inking, he's making no predictions about the publication date. "It'll come out when it's done," he says.

Despite his success, Lieber continues to hone his craft. Comic-book drawing, he explains, is "a lot like juggling. You have a lot of balls to keep in the air." Composing the panels, taking into account the story's drama and emphasizing different character reactions are all tasks the penciller must address.

"If you shift the lighting on the character, that's one feeling. If you keep the camera far away and watch him with a cold eye, that's another feeling," Lieber explains. "As you get more experienced, you can start taking some things for granted. Drawing problems go away."

Lieber works hard at learning how to juggle the balls of comic book drawing. A typical day begins late. He wakes up around noon, and gets to work early in the afternoon. After an hour or so of correspondence and phone conversations, he heads over to the local public library for research.

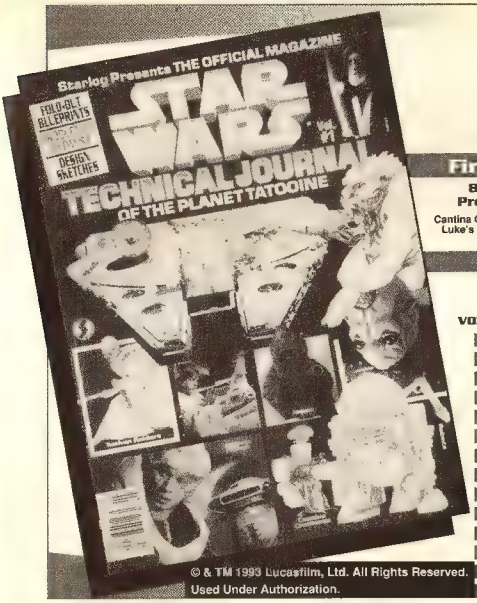
Since he needs to be able to depict the backdrop for his comics—what people look like, what weapons they use—Lieber has an extensive photo file. Already in his career, he's needed to draw South Pacific and Cambodian backdrops. For a part of the *Hawkman* annual that took place at a Chicago high school, Lieber snuck back into his old school to see how high schoolers dress and move today.

The trips to the library are for more than just research. It's also a chance for Lieber to get away from the drawing table in the small spare room in his apartment, exercise and see people. "You'll notice I'm not very tan," he jokes.

After dinner, he begins drawing. He warms up by working on his own projects, then moves to *Hawkman*. He likes drawing at night, when there is less noise and fewer distractions. He often stays at his drawing board until 4 or 5 a.m. "He's a workhorse. Every editor's dream come true," says Spivey.

Eventually, Lieber wants to own a comic book company and do everything from character and plot creation to marketing. For now, though, Lieber realizes he's lucky for what he has. If he hadn't been successful with comics, he says, "I would be working a no-brainer somewhere, something with no creativity and no stress. I could not work in an office. I would shut down."

An office job does not appear to be in Lieber's future. According to Spivey, Steve Lieber "is one of the most talented rising stars I've ever had the pleasure of working with. As long as he wants to remain on *Hawkman*, we'll be happy to have him."



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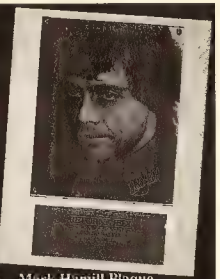

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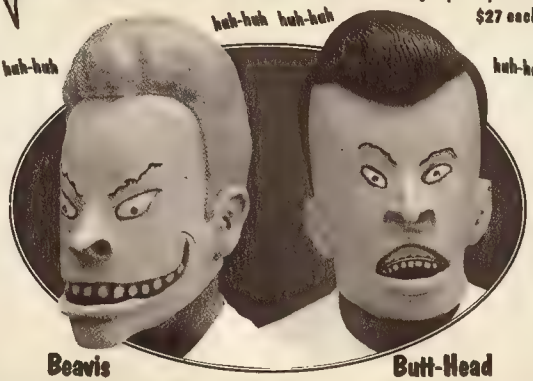

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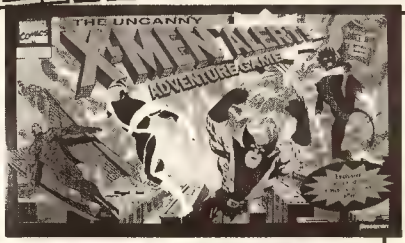

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The Shadow

by WILL MURRAY

Stepping out of the darkness, Alec Baldwin sheds some light on his heroic alter-ego.

The Shadow is in trouble. Attired in his black cloak and hat, he faces his arch-foe, Shiwan Khan, twin automatics drawn. Khan reposes on his barbaric throne, strangely unconcerned.

"Action!" cries director Russell Mulcahy.

The Shadow's oversized guns blaze. Their sound is titanic in the close confines. On either side of the throne, objects explode under the withering fire. And, utterly unharmed, Shiwan Khan throws back his head and laughs uproariously. Before the Master of Darkness can loose more shots, he is thrown off-balance.

"Is the floor turning?" the director wonders aloud.

Yes, the sunken floor is definitely moving. Like a great turntable it revolves, dipping and wobbling, keeping The Shadow from firing his guns. Black cloak swirling this way and that, he lurches and weaves, darkly majestic in his utter helplessness.

"Turn the other way," Mulcahy directs.

The Shadow obeys, performing a drunken ballet for the camera. The scene goes on and on, obviously to be edited down later. Abruptly, The Shadow goes down. Hard. And it's *not* in the script.

"Cut!" Mulcahy shouts.

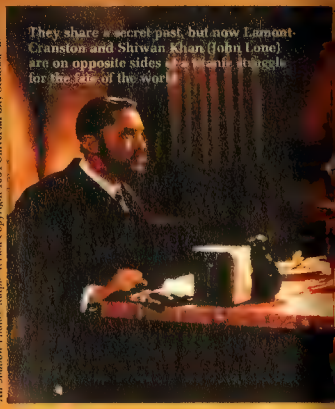
Grips rush in, quickly assessing the trouble. The Shadow's long cloak has snagged in the shifting space between the turntable and the raised rim, pulling him down. But he's all right.

Shooting pauses, and The Shadow surrenders his mighty guns before sweeping down the throne room steps to the privacy of his sanctum on the Universal lot—his trailer.

As he glides past, he undoes his concealing scarf, creating a flash of doubt. Is it really Alec Baldwin under that predatory beak? Or just his double?

Later, sans facial prosthetics, Bald-

From his hidden sanctum, Lamont Cranston keeps in constant contact with a city-wide cadre of agents who make sure The Shadow knows.



They share a secret past, but now Lamont Cranston and Shiwan Khan (John Lone) are on opposite sides in a titanic struggle for the fate of the world.

All Shadow Photos: Ralph Nelson Copyright 1994 Universal City Studios, Inc.

win agrees to uncloak some of the mysteries behind just how he came to be The Shadow.

"A wonderful group to cultivate as an audience is young people," he begins. "Very young people. My wife [Kim Basinger] was in *Batman* and she has a constant annuity of kids who identify her as that character. She does charitable work, summer camps for cancer kids, and they all call her Vicki Vale. That's a *wonderful* experience for an actor, to do a movie that children will go see. My appetites as an actor tend not to go in that direction. I tend to want to do more adult things."

Yet Baldwin is clear that *The Shadow* is not merely a comic-book presentation of the classic pulp and radio hero. He plays a more mature version of The Shadow, one whose past is dark and troubled, and includes a murderous stint as an opium lord. But the need to acquire a PG-13 rating drives many of the choices made on this film.

"You *can* do an adult version of these kinds of movies," he says. "I always thought, why not do a really, really adult version of *Batman*? Where the power that came to this guy—I'm saying this hypothetically—comes from fetishism. The minute the guy puts the clothes on, he is charged with some kind of sexual thing. You could really go bizarre with this idea. I'm not saying make it like Ralph Bakshi, but you could do many things."

No matter how hard the cast and crew try to avoid it, comparisons between *The Shadow* and *Batman* keep coming up. In Baldwin's case, they're impossible to avoid. He probably wouldn't even be in this film without wife Basinger (STARLOG #144). She came up on the project while doing *The Real McCoy* for *The Shadow*'s producer, Martin Bregman.

"My wife read it and said, 'I think Alec would love this kind of thing.' When they sent me the script, I said, 'This is radio. And this is comic book art—great art—but how do you do a fully realized live-action version of this? How do you *play* that guy?' I read the script very hesitantly. And it all just fell off the page. It was very witty, very funny, it zipped right by. It opened itself up to other possibilities, particularly in the rewrite."

Screenwriter David Koepp, who co-scripted last summer's blockbuster *Jurassic Park*, had already done several drafts of the screenplay, but Baldwin had such specific ideas on how to shape and hone the character, particularly his true self, Lamont Cranston, that a new round of revisions was mandated.

"As far as Cranston is concerned," Baldwin explains, "I didn't want him to be sullen. I don't want to get into a comparison with other superhero stories and their alter-egos, but I wanted this guy to be having a good time. Cranston has the world on a string. He's loving life. Cranston is not like other superhero alter-egos where their life seems to be lonely and miserable and dreary and they really get off when they become the other guy. It's really the opposite. He loathes and is highly conflicted about going to the place where he has to go, metaphysically speaking, to become the alter-ego. And becoming The Shadow is a *tremendous* burden to him. I remember saying, 'Whenever you see Cranston, he must always be having a ball. Then, duty calls and it's "Oh God, I gotta do this thing." ' And he articulates this in the story: 'What I was in Tibet, I *never* want to be that again.' "

"Becoming The Shadow is a *tremendous* burden to him," Baldwin reveals. Who knows what can happen when he gives free rein to his dark side?

Design & Layout: Jim McLernon

Shadow Characters Trademark & Copyright 1994 Advance Magazine Publishers

By The Shadow's side, as always, is his friend and companion Margo Lane (Penelope Ann Miller), but will the psychic bond they share make them more than just friends?

Baldwin's Shadow pulls together elements from various incarnations of the hero. Like The Shadow of the pulps, he operates out of a Manhattan sanctum where he controls a group of crime-busting secret agents. Unlike the pulps, he really *is* Lamont Cranston (the radio hero's identity), not World War I spy Kent Allard. Yet this Cranston *did* emerge from that war only to discover his occult side in Tibet. A surprising number of elements come from Howard Chaykin's 1984 *Shadow* mini-series for DC Comics—particularly the stylishly retro-western approach to the cloak and hat. *Batman* costume designer Bob Ringwood was responsible for that, while makeup effects artist Carl Fullerton conceived the distinctive facial physiognomy, which goes all the way back to the 1930s pulp magazine covers.

"It's something we really struggled with," Baldwin recalls. "That hawklike look that he had, how could you possibly deviate from that? To achieve it really dead on, the actor would have to be so gaunt in order to lay onto your own facial structure the bridges and hawk nose and cheekbones. To create all those hollow cavities, you would have to be like Basil Rathbone. Which I'm *not*. So we had to work with that.

"We really labored on the face's structure and how we would achieve that cavernous look. We built cheek bones and gave him a really pronounced cleft chin, but that's a reveal that's only made a couple of times, when he cranks his head back and laughs or cackles or shrieks. The rest of the time, he's concealed behind the scarlet scarf. It was essentially a four-to-five-hour makeup job."

In this version, The Shadow's infamous nose is part of the illusion of The Shadow persona. As Cranston, he wears Alec Baldwin's face. Various scleral lenses are employed to dramatize The Shadow's mind-clouding mode—another device borrowed from radio.

"When Cranston decides to put the whammy on people—influence them, so to speak—we went to a dead-black eight-ball kind of lens," Baldwin notes. "And that's when I am only myself without any of The Shadow makeup or drag. When I am The Shadow, we have mirrored lenses. I think they're going to optically treat them so they really sparkle when the light hits them."

"How could you deviate from that?" asks Baldwin, referring to the classic, hawk-like visage of The Shadow so familiar from hundreds of pulp covers.

Beetlejuice Photo. Copyright 1987 The Geffen Film Company

"I just viewed it as a missed opportunity," says Baldwin of his role as a mild-mannered ghost in *Beetlejuice* (here with Geena Davis).

In the old days of radio drama, the actors who played The Shadow had it easy. When they became The Shadow, they lowered their voices, spoke into a filtered mike and simply recited their lines.

"When you listen to the voice of The Shadow on radio, there's a power, a malevolence and a kind of anarchy in the voice," Baldwin relates. "There's a whiny kind of crazed quality—which is fine for radio. We don't think that's going to work in the movies. We now have to match a voice to a visual image, which they *didn't* have to do. That's what we're wrestling with at the moment. They don't know what the voice of The Shadow's going to be yet. Russell's going to play with a variety of approaches—maybe multiple tracks where you hear multiple voices, and ghosting where they electronically enhance my voice."

Baldwin admits to reviewing old radio tapes of *The Shadow*, but ultimately their value was limited. "I listened to them and the only value that they had for me was to get a sense of what they were going for. That's obviously radio. They had to do everything with sound. We have to create the visual image of this character in all of his activity. His invisibility, in three dimensions and in combat, his face up close to read his eyes and the willfulness of this character—all of that is a visual thing."

Playing a troubled Cranston falls comfortably into the scope of Baldwin's career choices to date, but portraying The Shadow is tricky, the actor admits.

"It's all imagination," he says. "It's the opposite of acting. It frightens me. Initially, I had a lot of trepidation. I thought to myself, 'What is the answer? How would someone like this move and dress?' And then you start coming up with some very simple answers. Number one, the character must always be effective. He's a highly complicated heroic figure. A crime-fighter. A superhero, for lack of a better term. So you're constructing scenes where you put him in tremendous danger and he always wins. That's what people want to see. I think that when you try to complicate it much beyond that, you run the risk of making a big mistake."

Adding to the challenge of being The Shadow is the fact the cloaked image will not, strictly speaking, be invisible but will instead appear on the screen as a hallucinogenic, computer-generated phantom. Many times, Baldwin would go through the trouble of being made up to be used only for fleeting moments.

Even without his trademark regalia, Lamont Cranston retains the seething presence of the Master of Darkness.

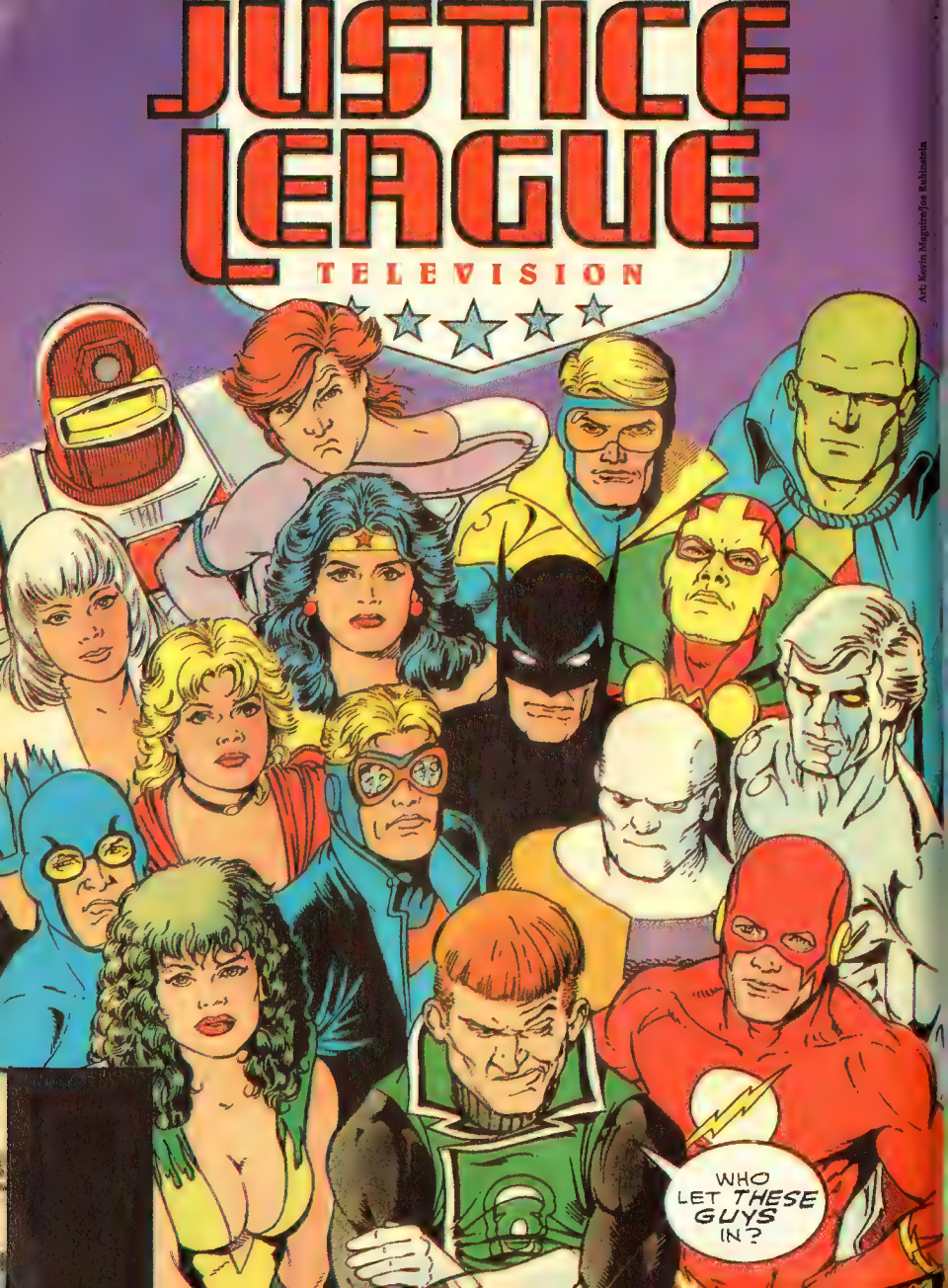
"People would be involved in scenes in which The Shadow is an optical figure," Baldwin explains. "Right at the moment when he needed to step out 3-D, boom!, they would put me in, and then The Shadow becomes 3-D, throws a punch, disarms someone, recedes again and becomes a midnight blue figure moving around the walls."

Better known for serious films like *Miami Blues*, *Glengarry Glen Ross* and *Malice*, Baldwin has appeared in only one previous fantasy film, *Beetlejuice*, where he played a ghost. It's not a favorite role.

"To tell you the truth, I hated every minute of doing *Beetlejuice*," Baldwin says. "Because I had no idea what I was doing. When I met [director] Tim Burton, I really had a take on the character. Everyone was coming in and doing these wacky characters, but Tim wanted the movie's ghosts to be the most banal people. He wanted the living to be the most absurd people, and I had wanted to do a Robert Cummings impersonation. I wanted the guy to be this wimpy milquetoast. Everything I came up with, Tim said, 'No, don't do that.'

"I feel like I came to the party empty-handed," he laments. "I'm not complaining about it, I just viewed it

(continued on page 60)


JUSTICE LEAGUE
TELEVISION
Art: Kevin Maguire/Joe Rubinstein
WHO LET THESE GUYS IN?

Bearing a price tag even Maxwell Lord couldn't afford, the "Justice League" got shelved.

By FRANK GARCIA

EXTERIOR: NELSON BACKYARD—DAY

The yard goes on for acres. Kent Nelson steps out his back door dressed in jeans and a T-shirt. He hesitates for a second—then steps out onto the lawn.

And an ANCIENT TOWER MATERIALIZES right in front of him.

Three stories high—no windows or doors. Nelson stares up at the spire looming above him—takes a deep breath—

And WALKS RIGHT THROUGH the stone wall.

INTERIOR: TOP OF TOWER—NIGHT

Kent comes up the stairs and enters a room filled with a BRIGHT GOLDEN LIGHT. In the center a marble pedestal holds:

A GOLDEN HELMET. Smooth as glass—no sharp corners—aerodynamically designed. It radiates sheer power.

Nelson steps in front of the helmet, his body tense. A VOICE seeps into the room—low and ominous, and it seems to comprise more than one entity:

LORD OF ORDER (V.O.)
Kent Nelson...

KENT
You were expecting someone else?

LORD OF ORDER (V.O.)
The Lords of Order require the use of your body.

KENT
And I don't have any choice in the matter, right?

LORD OF ORDER (V.O.)
It was you who unearthed that which now threatens this entire planet. Only Doctor Fate can prevent the inevitable consequences. Fulfill your destiny, Kent Nelson, or that which you care about most will no longer exist.

AS THEY NOW IS THE REALM OF CHAOS
IT'S JUST POSSIBLE THE FEARSOME SCIENCE'S ARE SO ADVANCED, WE MAKE THEMSELVES BACK THAT SOMEONE BELONGS TO US—
THE HELMET! WE MUST...
RESIST!
YOUR SOUND IS LOWERED GOD OF CHAOS

Art: Keith Giffen/Dave Hunt/Colors: Anthony Tollin

The mythos behind Dr. Fate provided the background for the *JLA* pilot, which featured the Lords of Chaos attacking Earth.

KENT
My family...

LORD OF ORDER (V.O.)
And much more.

Kent nods, knowing what he must do. He takes the Golden Helmet, raises it over his head—pauses for a beat—then lowers it onto his body.

SHUNK—the helmet sucks itself hard against Nelson's skull. Kent's body SHUDDERS—

A PLANE OF LIGHT moves down his human form—leaving in its wake a muscular figure. Dressed in blue with gold trimmings, gold gloves and a wraparound gold cape that seems to flutter with a life of its own, Kent Nelson is transformed into:

DOCTOR FATE. And the shape that is no longer an archaeologist turns away.

—From Justice League of America, *a teleplay by James Cappe & David Arnott. Story by Jeff Freilich, James Cappe & David Arnott. January 9, 1990.*

The *Justice League of America* never assembled on TV due to scenes like this one. After commissioning a script, NBC enthusiastically received the 114 pages and were allegedly "dying" to do it. But they were also befuddled by the mystically evil antagonists, who threaten the world and force a multi-millionaire to create the League. The network also felt that what they had been delivered was a feature film script, and deemed it too expensive for television.

Warner Bros., who owns DC Comics and all its properties, occasionally looks to DC's library for material to exploit for film or television treatment. The most visible results have been the two *Batman* feature films (a third now in development), and the two short-lived TV series *The Flash* and *The Human Target*, with *Lois & Clark* presently on the air.

At any given time, a wide variety of comics properties are under development for possible translation to the big or small screen. Few projects actually succeed in making it to production, and *Justice League of America* was one of those unsuccessful projects.

When Warner acquired Lorimar Television, the thought of bringing *Justice League* to life came from the top of the corporate echelon. It occurred to then-Lorimar president Henry David Salzman that since Lorimar had a new parent company, "Why not exploit DC's library for treatments?"

Salzman called DC Comics president Jenette Kahn and together they decided that *Justice League*—Keith Giffen, J.M. DeMatteis and Kevin Maguire's 1989 revitalization of the firm's premier super-team—would be a good title to adapt for TV.

"*The New Justice League of America* seemed like the most natural television show because it has an ensemble cast of humans who have made themselves into superheroes [with the exception of Martian Manhunter]," says *JLA* writer Jeff Freilich.

Freilich was tapped to write the story "because I had a background that applied itself to that kind of stuff. I knew the material and had a good rapport with DC Comics." As a producer/writer, Freilich had worked in the genre on *The Incredible Hulk* as well as *Dark Justice* and *Galactica 1980*. Most recently, Freilich was a producer on *Against the Grain*. He has also spent some time on *Freddy's Nightmares*, *Falcon Crest* and *Baretta*.

Aware of the enormity of the task involved in bringing a large group of colorful and witty characters to life, Freilich called on fellow scribes David Arnott and James Cappe to assist him in forming a story and writing the teleplay. After numerous conferences and writing sessions, *JLA*'s TV creators

All Justice League Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1987,1988, 1989, 1990, 1991 DC Comics Inc.

developed an adventure boasting the following heroes: Dr. Fate, Maxwell Lord, Martian Manhunter, Booster Gold, Blue Beetle, Fire, Ice, Mr. Miracle, Oberon, Inza Nelson (Kent's wife) and Big Barda.

Justice League is a direct, literal translation of the Giffen/DeMatteis/Maguire revamping. Characterization remains intact, including the witty banter between Blue Beetle and Booster Gold. But there are a few changes—Mr. Miracle does not hail from New Genesis. he is a mere *human* escape artist. Kent and Inza Nelson have a son, who plays a pivotal role in the story.

"Blue Beetle is a human who invents crazy stuff; Big Barda and all the rest of the team are existing human anomalies. Booster Gold is a human from the future," Freilich reports.

Other characters, notably Green Lantern and Batman, weren't available because there were other projects in the works for them.

Justice League of America opens with the archaeological discovery of a "Black Helmet" which is promptly stolen from its museum debut by Tibetan monks. Despite Booster Gold's efforts, they escape with the artifact and Dr. Fate soon discovers a Lord of Chaos—the Black Helmet of Chaos—is loose on the world.

Fate's attempted recovery fails and the Golden Helmet is yanked from Kent's body. Chaos wreaks havoc

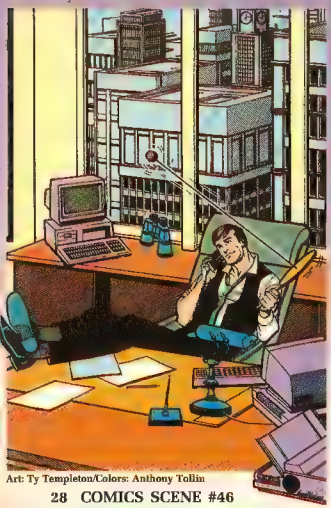
Viewers might have seen Mark Hamill in the tights of future man Booster Gold.

Art: Kevin Maguire/Al Gordon

The Martian Manhunter? Howzabout a bald Lou Ferrigno?

Art: Adam Hughes/Mark Nelson/Colors: Tom McCraw

If the series had aired, the man behind Maxwell Lord's paddle may have been *Jurassic Park*'s Sam Neill.



Art: Ty Templeton/Colors: Anthony Tollin

throughout the world, forcing the powerful and rich Maxwell Lord to assemble all known heroes—Booster, Martian Manhunter, Fire, Ice, Beetle and Mr. Miracle—to find Dr. Fate and save the world.

After a tour of their headquarters (complete with gym and jacuzzi), the team head off in Blue Beetle's Bug to Salem, Massachusetts to search for the missing Kent Nelson. But they soon return to New York to deal with the mayhem created by the Lord of Chaos. The United Nations falls under siege by terrorists, which means the JLA has to break in quietly. (A "lifted" sequence from the Giffen/DeMatteis/Maguire book.) The religious leader the Dalai Lama, dons the deadly Black Helmet and becomes possessed by the Lords of Chaos.

In the cataclysmic conclusion, a nuclear attack is engaged by all the superpower nations simultaneously. Blue Beetle's missile deflector saves the day and when Kent Nelson recovers, he confronts the Lords of Chaos, still using the Lama's body.

VERY HIGH—LOOKING DOWN ON NEW YORK

FLASH—the sun comes out above Manhattan—BOOM—a nuclear shock wave spreads in a millisecond—the missile has hit—an after-burst.

A FIREBALL rages and hides the city from our view. A MUSHROOM CLOUD grows.

That's it. The Big Apple is history. EXCEPT:

ON THE GROUND

Everybody IS STILL ALIVE. The citizens of New York and the Justice League look up at the UNDERSIDE of a nuclear explosion—and they are surviving. SOMETHING is holding the atomic blast back just above the skyscrapers.

ABOVE THE SKYSCRAPERS

It's like some kind of nightmarish split-screen. Everything below a certain line is absolutely normal—while above rages the ultimate power of the universe.

Dr. Fate floats at the transition point—arms held wide—generating a massive PROTECTIVE BARRIER that makes Booster Gold's force field look like peanuts. But, wait—that's not all. Dr. Fate's helmet begins to GLOW.

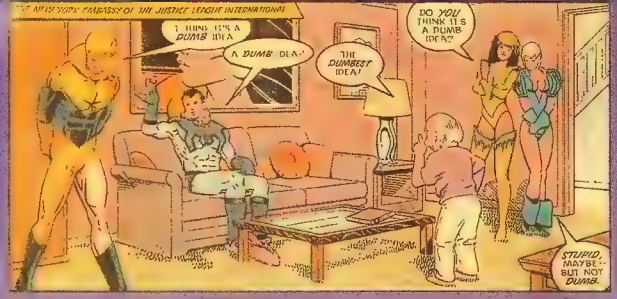
THE MUSHROOM CLOUD

swirls—then STOPS. It begins to

You would just have to get a young Bruce Willis-type for the smarmy, smirk-a-minute Blue Beetle.
THE NEXT NIGHT...
... I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU'RE GOING TO DO IT AGAIN!!
WELLLL, HE CROSSED HIS HEART AND HOPED TO DIE...
WISHFUL THINKING ISN'T GOING TO GET YOU ANYWHERE!
BEATRIZ - THAT WAS CRUEL!
YOU'RE GOING OUT WITH ATTILA THE HUN'S NEPHEW AND YOU CALL ME CRUEL?!
WHAT ARE YOU GETTING SO UPSET ABOUT?

What would any TV show be without a few spandex-clad babes? Fire and Ice would have been naturals.

Design & Layout: Luis Ramos



Art: Kevin Maguire/Al Gordon/Anthony Gaeta & P. D'Angelo

The network obviously thought it *would* have been a dumb idea to spend all that money on a JLA series. What do you think?

miraculously REVERSE DIRECTION—getting smaller—getting thinner—getting pulled into:

DR. FATE

A SPARKLING TRAIL leads from the center of the nuclear mass right into FATE'S HELMET. Dr. Fate's body quivers and vibrates as he somehow sucks the entire force of the blast INTO HIMSELF. The mushroom cloud is whisked away—the shock wave recedes—a reverse motion FLASH shrinks and swoops into Dr. Fate and—

KA-BOOM—the shock of it all BLASTS Fate away at escape velocity. Nothing is left but peacefully floating skies.

NBC was dying to make *Justice League*. I think what NBC realized was that we would wind up, ultimately, with repetitive stories," explains Freilich. "It's a six-note instead of a one-note show. Each story has to deal with a human victim, trapped in a situation where a superhero must rescue them. That's what comics are all about. The only problem is that comic books are done with pencil and ink. Artists can afford to do these incredibly fantastic, huge special FX scenes on a page, but to film a scene in *Justice League* would cost $3 million per episode, because you have guys who can fly and they can all do things."

Freilich says this script "would have made a great feature, but [NBC believed] it was too expensive for television. To make each of the six *Justice League* characters likable, they

Art: Keith Giffen/Ty Templeton

Art: Joe Staton/Jose Marzan Jr./Colors: Anthony Tollin

Guy Gardner, Batman and the Flash weren't available for this series due to other commitments.

"The Justice League appeals to all of us because they read like human characters," explains Freilich. All too human, it seems.

each had to have a super power and some characteristic that was accessible and serviced in every show. Now, you have 46 minutes [per hour episode], 15 of which are focused on the story and the victim. That leaves you with 30 minutes to service six characters, which means each character really only gets five minutes to do stuff."

Considering the feature route for this script, Freilich says, "It's still a distinct possibility. The problem is the same because there are still too many characters and only 90 minutes" to introduce and learn about them.

A mini-series platform might also be a good way to feature the League, he says, but today "the networks are reluctant to pour a lot of money into superhero shows. Partly because *The Flash* didn't really do well."

Despite the script's budgetary challenges, Freilich remains proud of the literal distillation of the *League* characters into script form. "What we did with the script was actually pretty good. We serviced everybody and when you put the script down, whether you liked the story or not, you did have a fairly good idea who the characters are. That's with two hours—imagine that with only 46 minutes!"

Art: Adam Hughes/Jose Marzan, Jr./Colors: Gene D'Angelo

The total destruction of New York City was just one of the scenes which would have pushed the *JLA* pilot *way* over the usual TV budget.

Playing casting director for a moment, Freilich considers who they might have signed aboard the *Justice League*.

"Very often the case in television, when fantasizing casting, we would say, 'We want a young Bruce Willis' and then go out and look for those people," says Freilich. Not prone to stunt casting, Freilich prefers unknowns for many of the heroes. However, if *JLA* were to be treated as a feature, the game becomes more fun.

"With a cast that large, you can't really afford to use feature film actors," says Freilich. "It's not a question of expense, by the way, it's a question of commitment. If a person is a movie star, they generally don't want to commit to a TV series. They wouldn't be able to work on movies."

When it's suggested that Sam (*Jurassic Park*) Neill would be a good Maxwell Lord, Freilich lights up and responds positively. "Sam Neill would be a very good Max. When we wrote *Justice League*, Neill was an unknown. He has done so many things in the last few years. He would be a superb Max Lord."

For Mr. Miracle's boisterous, loud-mouthed manager, Oberon, Billy (*Willow*) Barty (STARLOG #130) snatches the role. "A young version of Billy Barty [would be better]," says Freilich. "He's a bit old. There are quite a few excellent small actors. It's just unfortunate there are very rarely parts for them. Billy Barty *is* the person you have in mind immediately."

Offering a surprising suggestion for Mr. Miracle, Freilich thinks real-life escape artist David Copperfield would do the job well.

"When they picked Bill Bixby for *The Magician*, he was already an amateur magician," the writer explains. "When they cast Burt Lancaster as a trapeze artist [in the 1956 film *Trapeze*], he was an acrobat and an aerial artist before becoming an actor. It always makes sense. You save yourself the aggravation of starting a scene with someone and using the stunt double throughout. [Performing magic] is difficult to teach people. You have to have a talent for that kind of stuff."

For the two witty male leads, Blue Beetle and Booster Gold, Freilich envisions a young Woody Allen for Beetle and a young Bruce Willis type for Booster. He says Mark Hamill might do Booster's role well, due to its similarity to his portrayal of the Trickster in *The Flash*. "But I don't know if we would have gone with Hamill or someone new," Freilich muses.

"It's like *Lois & Clark*; no one has really heard of these actors before. It's the franchise that's famous. When George Reeves was cast for *The Adventures of Superman*, he was an un-

(continued on page 62)

Who better to play escape artist Mister Miracle than real-life escape artist David Copperfield.

Art: Jim Aparo/Colors: Anthony Tollin

GEOFFREY STOCKTON
rules the New York underworld.
He's over 300 years old, and seeks to draw The Dark into a deadly battle for supremacy over the city.
THE DARK, only from Continüm Comics!

THE DARK

by Joseph Naftali, Todd Lidstone, Kurt Hoff, & George Pérez.

THE DARK, GEOFFREY STOCKTON, CONTINUM COMICS © & TM 1994 Joseph Naftali

THE MASK

BY MARC SHAPIRO

From cult hit to big-screen action, "The Mask" is the hero you least expect.

The first time Jim Carrey walked on the set of *The Mask* in his green, facehugging hood, it was love at first sight. Or as Carrey remembers it, shock.

"People took one look at me and were going, 'woooo,' " relates the rubber-limbed comedian. "Their reaction was like, 'This is going to be some weird scene.' "

The Mask, the latest comic-book hero, or in this case anti-hero, to make the leap from paneled page to silver screen, is turning out to be just that, "one weird scene." Which, in looking at its pedigree, should come as no surprise. *The Mask*, Dark Horse Comics' homage to Tex Avery cartoons with a very pronounced twist, isn't coming to film with the recognition factor that preceded *Batman* and *Superman*. Even at its current height of popularity, Dark Horse's head honcho Mike Richardson concedes that a typical issue of *The Mask* sells less than 50,000 copies.

So, why would cost-conscious New Line Cinema drop a bundle (an estimated $20 million) on this cast and state-of-the-art digital FX courtesy of Industrial Light & Magic. Chuck Russell, who signed on to this cinematic crap shoot as director and writer, says the reason is spelled R-I-S-K.

"It's *not* your standard format," Russell responds. "This is not your typical superhero film. It's different. It's risky. That's *why* people were interested."

Russell, the genre veteran who helmed *A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors* and *The Blob*, doesn't want to spill the beans on the *Mask* story details, but he does tip the plot kettle just a shade to reveal

Photos & Images

"There is an origin prologue. An ancient mask is discovered by this repressed bank account manager named Stanley Ipkiss [Carrey], who lives emotionally on the edge in Edge City. At one point, he puts on the mask and discovers, quite literally, that he can be or do anything. He immediately finds himself in all kinds of trouble, because he has the mask and because everybody else wants it. But, ultimately, the biggest problem he faces is that once he puts on the mask, he never quite knows what's going to happen."

Photo: K. Wright

"An ancient mask is discovered by this repressed bank account manager named Stanley Ipkiss," says director Chuck Russell. Even his best bud Charlie (Richard Jeni) can't keep him on the straight-and-narrow.

Filling out the cast are fellow comic Richard Jeni as Stanley's sidekick Charlie, Peter Greene as bad guy Dorian, Amy Yasbeck as a reporter, Peggy, who smells a story and Peter Riegert as one of Edge City's finest, Lt. Kellaway. Playing an integral part in *The Mask*'s marriage of live action and animation are the ILM wizards. *The Mask* was filmed in 50 days of principal photography over a lot of what Russell describes as naturally "unique" indoor and outdoor locations.

For those of you who arrived late, *The Mask* originally came to demented life in 1982 as the brainchild of comic-book store owner and devotee Richardson. "I saw the Mask as a cross between the Creeper, Batman and the Joker," Richardson says. "I gave him the ability to change appearance and had the notion of him mysteriously disappearing at the end of each adventure."

Richardson and Randy Stradley, now Dark Horse creative director, concocted a script that had potential but sat dormant. In 1985, a one-shot rendering of *The Mask*, pencilled by Richardson and inked by Jim Smith, appeared in *APA 5*. The original drawing was promptly retired to a back shelf of one of Richardson's comics shops and forgotten until 1987, when Richardson, who by this time had his fledgling Dark Horse Comics in operation, resurrected the Mask as the Masque in *Dark Horse Comics* #10. The Masque, basically a "pun, kill, pun, kill" type of guy, survived in this incarnation until his temporary hiatus following *Dark Horse Presents* #21.

A slightly redesigned Masque, now the Mask, resurfaced in the first issue of Dark Horse's 1989 anthology *Mayhem* in 1989 as a goofy, nightmarish cross between an Avery cartoon and *Terminator*. A strong following had developed around this green-masked, bent character and the buzz, not too long after his appearance in *Mayhem*, reached all the way from Dark Horse's Oregon offices to the Los Angeles offices of New Line Cinema and high-placed kindred spirit Michael De Luca.

"There was a kind of Tex Avery car-

Photo: K. Wright

There are two reasons why Stanley Ipkiss is hot on the heels of an ancient wooden mask—the affections of Cameron Diaz, and the power to be a loony green kook.

toonish quality to what *The Mask* did that we felt made the character attractive as a movie project," says De Luca, picking up the odyssey. "During the next two years, we developed a few scripts [by Michael Farren and Mark Verheiden] and it quickly became clear that the level of special FX required to do this right would be beyond what we had done before. So we decided to hold onto it until we felt we were in a position to sink $20 million into the budget to get the ILM level special FX we felt we *needed* to do the film right."

Around the time that New Line acquired film rights to *The Mask*, Russell was perusing his local comic book shop when he spied *The Mask* staring back at him. Russell liked what he saw. "felt visually it was a great concept" and immediately set about tracking down film rights to the comic. "The same week I discovered the comic, I found out that New Line had the rights; they called me and asked if I wanted to be involved. Unfortunately, I was involved in other projects at the time and felt I was spreading myself too thin, so I went away."

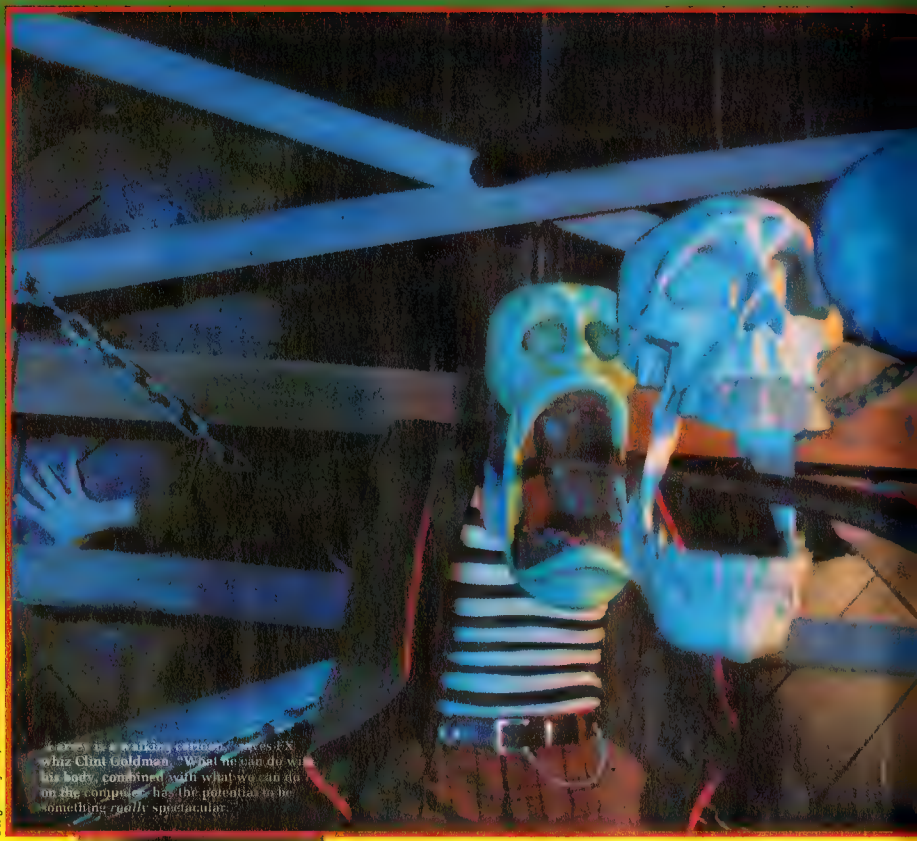
But *The Mask* didn't. Director Jack (*The Hidden*) Shoulder was briefly attached to the film. The FX strides made first by *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* and, later, *Jurassic Park* suddenly made the madcap requirements of *The Mask* feasible. And the script drafts kept on coming.

"In the pre-Chuck Russell script, chasing the mask, finding the mask and becoming the Mask was the story," notes De Luca. "Unfortunately, we didn't have much of the Mask in the story. We knew the gags in any script would be there, but we needed a story people could care about."

"This is not your typical superhero film," maintains Russell. "It's different, it's quirky. It's *throbbing*.

Put that tongue *back* in your mouth Mr. Kiddie! There are children reading. And they're reading about Jim Carrey's star turn as, and in, *The Mask*.

All Mask Photos Copyright 1994 New Line Cinema



Design & Layout: Jim McLernon

Carrey is a wonkie, cartoony, rubber-faced whiz Clint Goldman. "What he can do with his body, combined with what we can do on the computer, has the potential to be something *really* spectacular."

Photos: D. Michaels

Woke up, fell out of bed, dragged a comb across my...bald...lime green...melon-shaped...head?

Russell re-entered the picture in 1991 with a continued interest in the project. But only on his terms. "I told them I was interested if they would get off the idea of the comic book—which is very violent and, to a large extent, a horror story," the director explains. "What *I* wanted to make was a romantic, fantasy comedy that was well-grounded in its characters and that would work with the special FX. I also wanted to make a movie with an edge. I didn't necessarily want to make a Disney film, but I knew I didn't want to make a movie about another fantasy character [like Freddy Krueger] who destroys people."

De Luca agreed with Russell's revisionist view of *The Mask*. "Chuck wanted to build this big, funny, romantic comedy, kind of like *Splash*, that would have the Mask as the catalyst."

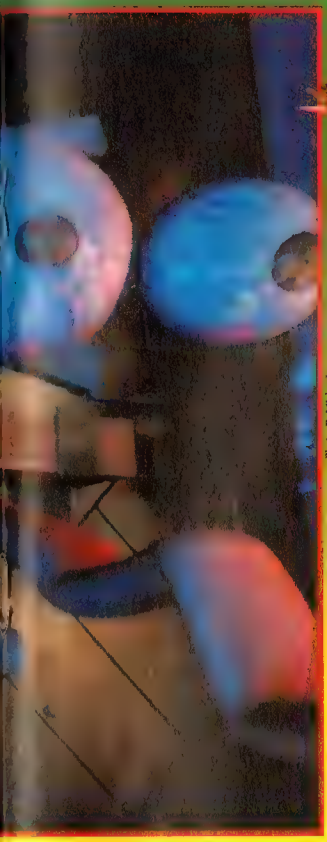


Photo: D. Michaels

Dag-nabbit! Them rascally varmints dun shot me! Hold on, I think I feel an Oscar-caliber death scene coming up.

Photo: K. Wright

There's one helluva scoop in Edge City, and his name is Ipkiss. Amy Yasbeck serves up a pistachio story as Peggy, the reporter just looking for a nice guy.

And, while hammering out what would become the definitive *Mask* script, Russell admits that a great deal of his anti-hero sentiment crept into the pages. "I knew going in that the Mask wouldn't be the stereotypical superhero in longjohns and a cape. The outlandish nature of this comic book character allowed me to create a few more rules. I always felt that if I woke up one morning with superpowers, I wouldn't so much be interested in helping strangers and running off to save the United Nations as I would be in using my powers to get the girl and solve my own problems. That was obviously the comic book's attitude, and I felt it was important that those non-superhero ideas make it to the film."

The director's ideas struck a quirky chord in many people. ILM didn't think twice about climbing aboard. Neither did makeup master Greg Cannom. But Russell knew he had hit a creative home run the day Jim Carrey walked into his office. "I wrote the script with Jim in mind and hoped he would recognize that he was the only one who could really play the character. During our first meeting, he was literally climbing all over me. He reacted to the idea of playing the Mask just the way I hoped he would."

And in doing so, he saved *The Mask* budget a bag of bucks. "Jim was really the *only* guy who could play this character," echoes De Luca. "He's like the human plastic man. He saved us thousands of dollars in FX just by his ability to naturally contort his body."

For his part, Carrey looked at *The Mask* as "a dream part. It's the kind of role where I knew going in that I could be a straight, serious young man one moment and still give the audience what they expect of me, which is a little lunacy."

Everyone went their pre-production way. Cannom, with Russell taking the occasional peek over his shoulder, constructed the skintight green Mask makeup that would, once lensing began, tie Carrey to the chair for four hours daily. Clint Goldman, a constant on-stage presence from ILM, saw his *Mask* assignment as a prime example of how the digital/technological FX walls were tumbling down.

"This film shows it's possible to do these kinds of effects without it having to be a Steven Spielberg/George Lucas/Amblin film," says Goldman, who describes his *Mask* gig as "photo-realistic Looney Tunes. Basically, what we're doing is taking 35mm film, scanning it into the computers, making it digital and outputting it onto 35mm negatives. It's still not inexpensive, but the technology has reached a point where on a *Mask*-level budget, we can get in there and make things happen."

One of the more unusual aspects, in Goldman's view, is the sequence where Stanley's dog, Milo, runs around a room and, at one point, puts on the mask. The dog, according to set reports, is actually director Russell's real-life terrier.

Goldman fills in the FX holes. "We've built a 3-D computer-generated dog head. Then, we watch as the dog moves around the room in real time and have to figure out *when* to put the mask on the dog."

But the FX whiz claims that the real fun occurs when ILM and Carrey collide. "Carrey is a walking cartoon. What he can do with his mouth and body, combined with what we can do on the computer, has the potential to be something *really* spectacular."

Russell, with the aid of Pete Von Sholly, extensively storyboarded *The Mask*. He also spent a great deal of time with Carrey and the other actors ironing out the bugs of the expected physical moves. But once filming began, including the scenes of Milo running around and a nightclub sequence in which the Mask romances his honey and goes head on with the bad guys, Russell was the first to admit that playing it strictly by the script soon went out the window.

(continued on page 58)

THE RUBBER BAND MAN

By PAT JANKIEWICZ

It'll be a stretch to get Plastic Man to the screen.

There has never really been a superhero like Plastic Man. Upon his debut in 1941, "Plas" (as he was affectionately known) was a safe-cracking gangster named Eel O'Brian. Doused with acid which gave his body an amazing rubbery quality, he was nursed back to health by a monk. Then, O'Brian put on a red jumpsuit and goggles to fight crime as Plastic Man.

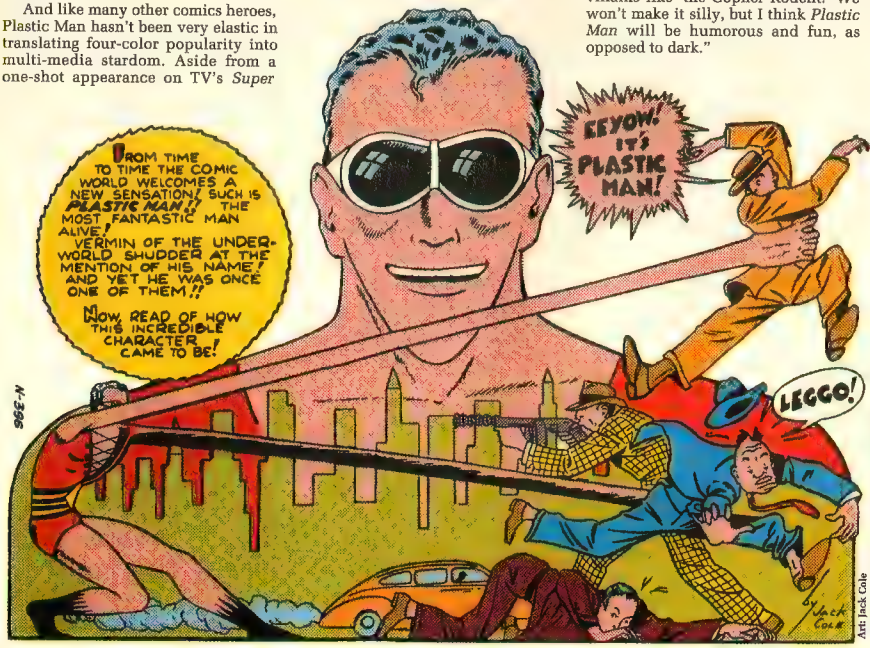
Teamed with his best friend, an unemployed bumbler named Woozy Winks, Plas solved murders and stopped criminals in a series that managed to spoof both Warner Bros. crime movies and more serious superhero fare. Creator Jack Cole and other writers, including Mickey Spillane, gave the strip a vibrant energy, mocking the hard-boiled situations the characters entered.

And like many other comics heroes, Plastic Man hasn't been very elastic in translating four-color popularity into multi-media stardom. Aside from a one-shot appearance on TV's *Super Friends* and his own short-lived cartoon (*The Plastic Man Comedy Adventure Show*), the stretchable sleuth is a borderline unknown. That situation is about to change, as producer Steven Spielberg and director Bryan Spicer ready Plastic Man for the big screen, courtesy of Amblin Entertainment and Warner Bros.

Spicer directed the well-received pilot of *The Adventures of Brisco County, Jr.* as well as episodes of *seaQuest*, *Superboy* and *Eerie, Indiana* (see STARLOG PLATINUM EDITION #3). He has definite plans for the character. "We're trying to create another kind of superhero movie, with a unique story—we're gonna do the origin.

"Plastic Man is different than Superman, because he's a hero who starts off as a criminal. In the beginning, he's a criminal who receives these plastic superpowers, so the first thing he would want to do is become a better criminal. Together with some other characters, he has a change of heart, which is his character arc through the picture, and what the story is really about. He changes from a bad person to a good person and becomes a superhero in the end, so it's different from most superhero films."

The director sees his pliable protagonist in a league of his own. "Plastic Man is different than Batman. Batman has a very dark-edged side, and Tim Burton made him even darker and edgier! Plastic Man's comic book was always more humorous and a little more silly, with villains like 'the Gopher Rodent.' We won't make it silly, but I think *Plastic Man* will be humorous and fun, as opposed to dark."


FROM TIME TO TIME THE COMIC WORLD WELCOMES A NEW SENSATION! SUCH IS PLASTIC MAN!! THE MOST FANTASTIC MAN ALIVE! VERMIN OF THE UNDERWORLD SHUDDER AT THE MENTION OF HIS NAME! AND YET HE WAS ONCE ONE OF THEM!!
NOW, READ OF HOW THIS INCREDIBLE CHARACTER CAME TO BE!
EEYOW! IT'S PLASTIC MAN!
LEGGO!
N-396
by Jack Cole

Art: Jack Cole
All Plastic Man Cole Art: Copyright 1941 Comic Magazines, Inc.

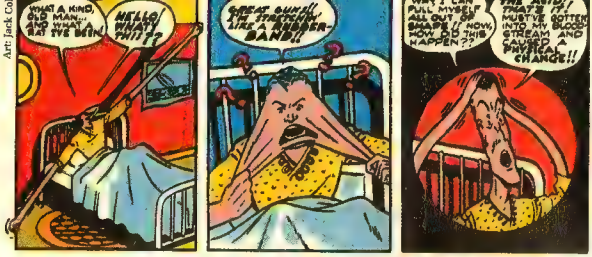
Spicer reveals that Plastic Man will wear his goggles and red tights but may lose his perpetually dazed pal, Woozy Winks. "I'm not sure he'll be in the movie," the director muses. "He was sort of a drunk in the comics, so we'll see. Woozy's not out of the movie, but he may not be called that name. There will probably be a sidekick/friend."

The director feels that *Plastic Man* "is gonna be a big challenge. The challenge is creating another superhero film that's worthy of the $40 or $50 million we're going to spend on it. The challenge is *not* to make it just another special FX movie, I want to make it a real human story with good characters, good comedy and with great special FX on top of that—not just a bunch of special FX and a bad story."

What does he like about Plas as a character? "We don't know yet," he confesses. "We don't know exactly who he is yet—it depends on the character. If it's a Bruce Willis type of character, he's a guy with an attitude, a reluctant superhero, which I think is a *very* good character to play. Like Willis in *Die Hard*. He's a reluctant cop, he didn't want to be there, but he was and had to do the job."

"*Plastic Man* will be humorous and fun as opposed to dark," reveals director Bryan Spicer, who is developing the rubbery hero's adventures for the screen.

Art: Hilary Barta/Colors: Rick Taylor Design & Layout: Jim McLaren


WHAT A KIND, OLD MAN... AND WHAT A RAT I'VE BEEN!
HELLO THERE, PHIL!?
GREAT GUNS!!... THE TRANSFER-ENCE BAND!!
WHAT'S THAT?! I'M FULL OF ALL OUT OF BALANCE! I'M LOSIN' BLOOD! STREAM AND BAD! WHAT'S HOW? HOW DID THIS HAPPEN??
I'M A FREAK!! MUSTVE GOTTEN INTO THE WRONG BATTERY CHARGE!!

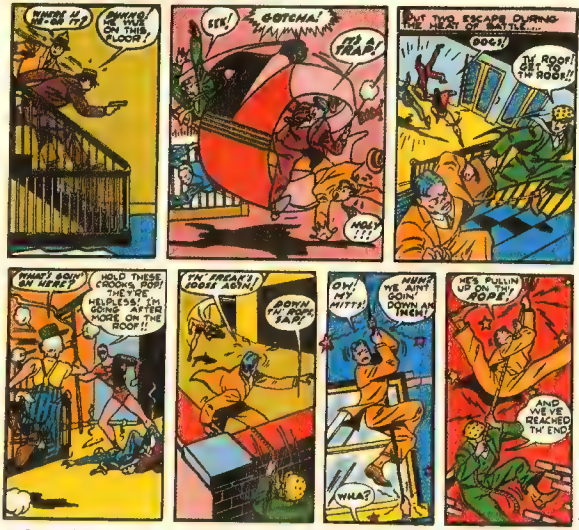
Art: Jack Cole

Small-time hood Eel O'Brian got a rude awakening one morning after an accidental acid bath made a few slight changes to his body chemistry.

Spicer did see the short-lived *Plastic Man* cartoon and "found it hard to watch. It was kind of silly. I read a lot of his early comic books. The early '40s ones are hard to find and very expensive," he admits. "I do have a few of 'em, and I've also seen the comics from the '70s."

Some directors backed off *Plastic Man* because they were afraid that it might become nothing more than an FX opus. Joe (*Gremlins*) Dante notes that "I worked on *Plastic Man* for awhile. I didn't see enough material there for a feature for me, personally. The character is somewhat obscure to people now. His backstory is pretty much nothing and they had to invent everything for him.

"He does his 'snaking arms around corners' bit and all that stuff. I'm sure with morphing that could be very impressive, and that's *why* they're pursuing it, but I don't see anything inherently exciting about *Plastic Man*, so I bowed out. I read it as a kid, and *Plastic Man* was a very strange comic—very cold and uninvolving."


WHOSE H-H-ON TH'?
GWAAK! OH YEAH, ON THIS FLOOR!
SEE!
GOTCHA!
IT'S A TRAP!
BUT TWO ESCAPE DURING THE HEAT OF BATTLE...
OOOF!
TH' ROOF! GET TO TH' ROOF!!
HOLY!!!
WHAT? GOIN' UP HERE?
HOLD THESE CROOKS, ROY! THEY'RE HELPLESS! I'M GOING AFTER MORE ON THE ROOF!!
TH' TRAIN!! JOOSE AOTH!
DOWN TH' POPS, SAP!
OW! MY MITTS!
WE AIN'T GOIN' DOWN AN INCH!
WHA?
HE'S PULLIN' UP ON TH' ROPE...
AND WE'VE REACHED TH' END.

Art: Jack Cole

Plastic Man Characters: Copyright 1976 National Periodical Publications Inc.

"There will be two or three times as many FX shots as in *Terminator 2*," promises Spicer, who has ILM lined up to stretch the limits of FX technology.

Spicer, however, has a basic affection for the character. He's determined to give the project a solid storyline. "Plastic Man will be a real person," he declares. "I'm working very closely on developing a good script. We've been through a few scripts that haven't been quite up to par, so I'm gonna keep working on it. It's worth going ahead on if it's right. I've been working with various writers at this stage, developing different characters and different stories. Bob Zemeckis said to me, 'Don't start until you get a good script!'

"We *had* started production at one time because we were expecting a good script from some writers, but it didn't come through, so we shut down," he reveals. "We had Tom Sanders, the production designer from *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, Bob Ringwood doing the costumes [as he did for *Batman* and *The Shadow*] and Joan Bradshaw, one of the producers of *Back to the Future*. That's all we had at that point."

When Spicer came onto the project, "There had been other scripts that didn't work. The development process on any movie is very hard," he relates. "You see a movie now and it could have been in development for 10 years; most movies are. I've been on *Plastic Man* for two years."

Audiences will believe that a man can stretch. "ILM is doing all the computer animation for his bending, stretching and morphing effects," Spicer reveals. "It's *Terminator 2* technology, but that was a secondary character [the villainous T-1000]. This will be a primary character and there will be two to three times as many FX shots as in *Terminator 2*, and it will be better because they've had several years since *T2* and the technology has evolved."

Part of the project's appeal "is the fact that it was offered to me and it seemed like a chance to exploit and use more of the computer technology that has become very popular in

(continued on page 62)

Will Bruce Willis don Plas' familiar red suit and goggles? Jim Carrey and Tom Hanks are also possible Plastic Men.

MARVEL'S KNIGHTS

Deadly Knights: Copyright 1994 Marvel Entertainment & DC Comics Inc.

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

This time, Batman & the Punisher clash on John Romita Jr.'s playground.

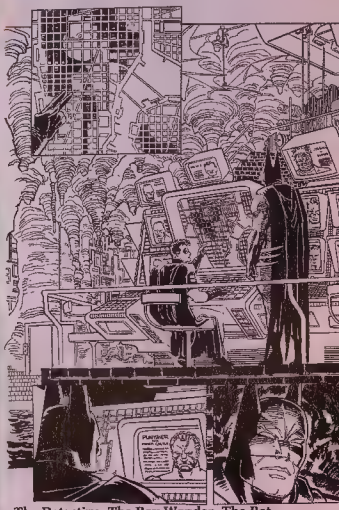
When the Punisher met up with the Azrael version of Batman in *Batman/Punisher: Lake of Fire*, it was just the warmup for the slam-bang main event in *Punisher/Batman: Deadly Knights*, says John Romita, Jr.

Romita, who's pencilling the Marvel Comics half of the inter-company crossover, is thrilled to be drawing Bruce Wayne's first meeting with Frank Castle. "I'm doing the classic version of Batman and the Punisher together, which is a real kick," he says. "I'm doing the typical Batman that everybody knows!"

Unlike many comics pros who long to draw the Dark Knight, Romita actually never had a strong desire to work on the character. "Everybody I've ever worked with has always said, 'If I ever work for DC, I want to do Batman,' " he explains. "That's what everybody says, because he's a dark character. I never had any huge urge to draw him, but the longer I'm in the business, the more I think I identify with that character—I've done the Punisher and they're very similar. They have deep,

Photo By & Copyright 1994 Albert L. Ortega

John Romita Sr. (right), a legend in his own right, sired the young turk John Romita Jr., who lets fans see Bruce Wayne and Frank Castle wreak havoc.



The Detective. The Boy Wonder. The Bat-computer. What more could you need to wage a war against crime? A 'Nam vet with more artillery than Cuba, perhaps?

All Batman Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1982, 1991, 1994 DC Comics Inc.

dark pasts, their families were murdered and so on. But when I first started working on them, it hit me—this is a blast!"

The artist says he had no problem juxtaposing the worlds of the Punisher and Batman. "Basically, Gotham City *is* New York City—I don't know why they didn't just place it in New York in the first place!" laughs Romita. "I think when they created Batman, somebody thought it would be insane to use New York because they would then have to draw all of the buildings accurately. Bob Kane never drew a building that looked like anything in New York City other than through pure luck! They just made up their own city.

"Gotham is New York, and I think the Tim Burton Gotham is a real neat-looking version. I've gotten some reference sheets from DC of Gotham City, and it's excellent—beautiful, with incredible spires and a Gothic look."

The Marvel artist says that DC was extremely cooperative in the cross-over's planning. "It was pretty much, 'Let's do this and let's do that, Batman is a great character.' They wanted to make sure he looks as good as possible in the story, but I don't think that caused a problem," says Romita. "They're both good characters. The only question I had to ask was when I personally got the plot. I called Archie Goodwin at DC Comics and said, 'How do you want the character to appear? Is there a classic look?' He said, 'Just knock yourself out! You've been doing this long enough, and we trust you're not going to have him look too far away from what he really looks like. Have fun!' "

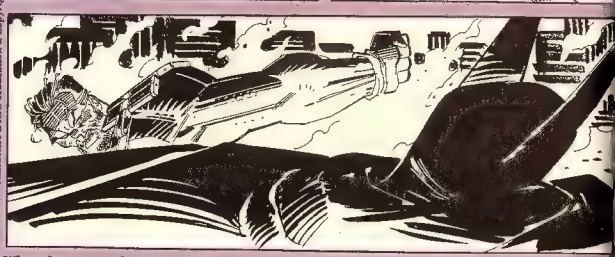
The Joker finds a kindred spirit in Jigsaw. "It's the two *villains* who've teamed up, not the two good guys," states Romita.

Recently, Romita has worked on several high-profile titles for Marvel, including *X-Men* and *Daredevil: Man Without Fear*, scripted by Frank Miller. Romita is teamed on *Punisher/Batman: Deadly Knights* with scripter Chuck Dixon.

"Chuck works for Marvel and DC," he says. "He knows how to tell a story and he knows how to create an atmosphere that has been good for both companies. I don't think either company has a problem with stories; they both like quality stories and Chuck produces quality work."

The story itself is fairly clear-cut. "It's pretty much meat and potatoes," Romita observes. "We have the Joker with Batman, so Chuck Dixon tried to get the Punisher's regular villain. Since the Punisher titles rarely feature a recurring villain, he picked the guy who has appeared the most, Jigsaw. He's a former prison convict—the Punisher destroyed his face in prison, cut him up and scarred him for life, so he has this vendetta against the Punisher. They're similar characters in that the Joker's face was also mangled.

"So, we have these four characters, two good guys and two bad guys, and Chuck has intertwined them. At the book's end, we have the Punisher against the Joker and Batman fighting Jigsaw, but that's *not* the key to the story. The key is, the Punisher is in his own little world of crimefighting, and Batman doesn't like that little world."



All Punisher Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1994 Marvel Entertainment Group

When these two urban warriors clash, even the world around them can't withstand the awesome fury. But the fight goes on...

As similar as the two costumed vigilantes might appear, Romita sees definite differences between them. "The Punisher is a kill-now-and-ask-questions-later vigilante," he observes. "Batman is a vigilante, but he's more of an old fuddy-duddy kind of crimefighter. He's tough, but he will *not* kill and ask questions later—he has more of a level head about him. As much as they're on the same side, this is *not* a buddy story at all. They butt heads a few times, and at the end it's basically 'Get out and never show your face here again.' But because the two villains have teamed up in some way, the two heroes are brought together. They're only on the same side because of the villains. This is not a buddy story in the least; these guys do not like each other. The Punisher doesn't like anybody anyway—he's so mean he hates himself!"

Punisher/Batman: Deadly Knights comes on the heels of the DC version, *Lake of Fire* (CS YEARBOOK #3). In that confrontation, the Azrael Batman took on the Punisher. According to Romita, there's little to link the two stories.

"There was only a slight reference to *Lake of Fire* that occurred before this story," he says. "At the beginning of *Deadly Knights*, the Punisher says to his assistant, 'Batman acted strange, like we've never met before.' There was nothing other than that which referred to the first story."

While the crossover events are considered part of continuity for both characters, Romita says there will probably not be any obvious, long-ranging repercussions for the Punisher. Instead, there will be more subtle effects in his characterization.

"The story gives the Punisher a link to reality," he says. "The best thing about the Punisher is that he's an automaton—revenge is his only direction in life.

"What *Punisher/Batman* does is give him a reality check. I mean, the Punisher rarely teams up with anybody! He doesn't like anybody, so this links him to another part of life. The Marvel Universe has its finite little stories, and then they try to intermingle them, but the Punisher is very rarely connected with other parts of the Marvel Universe. This story really connects the Punisher to a *comics* universe. He's such a distant character, he is a vigilante—he has no emotion, nothing. In the *Punisher: War Zone* series, he connects himself to an organized crime don's daughter. At one

"The violence level is pretty much where I wanted it to be," notes Romita. "You leave more to the imagination and you get a better reaction, even with violence."

All Deadly Knights Art: John Romita Jr.·Klaus Janson

Design & Layout: Jim McLarnon

"This is not a buddy story in the least," says Romita of *Punisher/Batman: Deadly Knights*. "These guys do *not* like each other."

point, you think he has emotion and heart in him, but he just used her to get to her father. The Punisher has *only* one emotion—pure hate.

"So, I think this relationship with Batman gives him credence in his comic-book reality. The Punisher has such a limited spectrum in life—one direction, and he has no reverse! That's the good thing about the character, but that's his only thing, so when you link him to other characters, it takes away from him. The fact that he appeared in a story with Wolverine and Ghost Rider at one point *didn't* strengthen the character for me. The only thing *Deadly Knights* does is show that the Punisher *is* in the real world, even though he may not consider it to be real."

Both the Punisher and Batman have been cited for extreme violence on occasion, but Romita says the violence in this Punisher/Batman tale was handled more subtly, thanks to advice he received from his father, longtime Marvel artist John Romita Sr. (CS #32-33).

"The violence level is pretty much what I wanted it to be," Romita says. "Chuck and I worked together on *Punisher: War Zone*, and we had every opportunity to slice and dice every human being on the face of the Earth in those issues, but we didn't. Since my father is such a classic movie fan, he taught me to be discreet in everything. You leave more to the imagination and you get a better reaction, even with violence. You show the Punisher standing over a guy with his .45 cocked and in the next panel, there's a closeup of the Punisher, maybe with a couple splatters of blood. You know what he has done, you just don't have

(continued on page 64)

"Batman is fun because I've never drawn him before," Romita says. "He's a fun character to draw with that dark cape."

GOTHAM NOCTURNA

Too dark for the Dark Knight, she didn't get to put the bite on an animated Batman.

By PAT JANKIEWICZ

Batman Art: Gene Colan/Dick Giordano
Nocturna Art: By & Courtesy Bruce Timm

Throughout *Batman: The Animated Series*, Gotham City's pointy-eared protector has fought a wide variety of foes: mobsters, madmen, renegade robots, science-spawned mutants and monsters, even a werewolf or two. Still, there was one supernatural menace that Fox TV found too unsettling for the caped crusader.

At his Warner Bros. Animation office, *Batman* producer/director Bruce Timm discusses the Dark Knight's close encounter with another creature of the night. "For the second season of *Batman*, we wanted to do a 'vampire show.' There was a character from the '80s named Nocturna, a female vampire. We really wanted to use her in the worst way and I came up with a really neat design for her," Timm states.

"It was going to be a two-part episode involving a really sick love story. Nocturna falls in love with Batman and wants to vampirize him so that they can live together eternally as vampires. She puts the bite on him at the first episode's end.

"Bruce Wayne wakes up the next morning, and says, 'Oh boy, how did I ever get home?' Alfred tells him, 'I found you and dragged you home. Good thing you're safe now.' Bruce feels like he has a really bad hangover, Alfred pulls open the blinds and Bruce starts shrieking because his skin is on fire! He looks in the mirror and sees that he has vampire fangs.

"The second episode was going to focus on Batman trying to cure himself of the vampire taint. We were going to say he *wasn't* a supernatural vampire but a biological vampire, with a chemical substance in his bloodstream. He's in the Batcave frantically trying to cure himself and at the same time he's looking at Alfred, thinking, 'God, he looks really tasty.'

"He's about to attack Alfred, when he realizes, 'This is horrible, I'm not gonna have time to cure myself of being a vampire; I'll have to destroy myself before I'm a danger to anybody!'

It seems the Dark Knight has a chink in his armor—a weakness for vampiric women. Producer Bruce Timm wanted to introduce Nocturna to Bruce Wayne and *Batman: The Animated Series*.

Art: Gene Colan/Tony De Zuniga/Colors: Adrienne Roy

But he's gone now...
The lord of depravity is dead... his ashes a golden stench under the red rain...
...while I... dizzy... so hard to rise... to remain standing...
"We were going to say that he *wasn't* a supernatural vampire but a biological vampire, with a chemical substance in his bloodstream," states Timm.
Timm wasn't the only one to think of transforming Bruce Wayne into a bloodsucker. *Batman & Dracula: Red Rain* even gave him wings.
A GREAT GIFT, ALFRED...
...FROM A GREAT AND HEROIC WOMAN.
TANYA IS DEAD, AT LAST... BUT HER LEGACY LIVES ON, IN ME...

Alfred says, 'Just calm down. You're too distraught to cure yourself. I'll go get Kirk Langstrom [the scientist who turns into Man-Bat]. He's the best guy to help you. Just lie down and relax!'

"Bruce tries to relax, but he can't control the bloodlust. Batman goes out to Gotham City looking for victims when he realizes at the last minute that he *must* cure himself. That was as far as we got, but we thought that would make a great two-parter.

"The Fox Network said, 'Nope, can't do it! First of all, you can't do vampires. You can't have anybody sucking anybody else's blood. You also can't have Batman as a vampire looking for victims, you can't have biological vampires, because you can't have a disease that's transmitted through blood, it's too much like AIDS,' " Timm recalls.

"We went back and forth with them on this. We *really* wanted to do it and they really *didn't* want us to, so we didn't, but it would have been fun."

The comic-book storyline that inspired the episode (from *Batman* and *Detective Comics*) was even grimmer; Batman is infected with the vampire virus by Robin, who got it from a lady vampire he met at college. In the story, Batman saves Vicki Vale from a bloodthirsty Robin and narrowly avoids preying on Alfred. He loses control, goes into Gotham City looking for victims and actually kills and drains a burglar in a back alley. ("I sent you to jail once, Marley. Now I only hope I haven't sent you to Hell.")

All Red Rain Art: Kelley Jones/Malcolm Jones III/Colors: Les Dorscheid Design & Layout: L. Nadeau

All Batman Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1982, 1993, 1994 DC Comics Inc.

"I'm sure we would have played up all those traditional vampire clichés and put some kind of twist on them," Timm notes.

There's a violent showdown with the vampires in a desecrated church before he finds a cure.

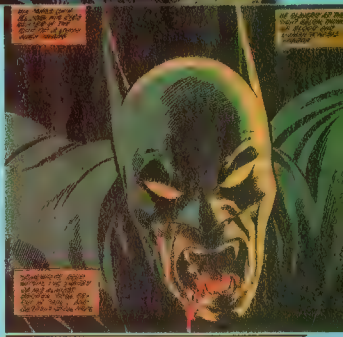
As for whether Batman would have taken a hammer and put his love at stake, Timm says, "I'm sure we would have played up all those traditional vampire clichés and put some kind of twist on them, but we never got past the development stage. I would have loved to have done it, but..."

Vampirism has always been somewhat taboo in television animation. Past incarnations, like the short-lived superhero monster/comedy shows *Monster Squad* and *Drac Pack*, simply ignored the main preoccupation of their vampire leads. *Super Friends* was able to circumvent the "no vampires" policy by doing an episode where Dracula turns Superman into a vampire by having him use ridiculous eyebeams instead of fangs.

Despite this setback, Batman has encountered several unusual monsters, including the reptile-man Killer Croc, the shape-shifting Clayface, the savage Man-Bat and a steroid-induced werewolf. "We get away with monsters easily," Timm explains. "It surprises me, because I think some of our monsters are *really* scary.

"Monsters are great, because the network thinks of them as fantasy figures and not things that could exist in real life. The censors are concerned about drive-by shootings; things that a kid can actually get in trouble by repeating in real life. They're actually more concerned about things like parents being divorced than monsters. They don't want any mention of divorce; they don't want kids to think about that. Monsters they don't have a problem with, which is great, because I love monsters," he says, gesturing towards the Aurora Universal Monster model kits that sit on his shelves.

"For the most part, the network doesn't like zombies, or any living dead people—even though we have one in the second season, a 2,000-year-old zombie sorceress [voiced by *Star Trek*'s Nichelle Nichols]. It's pretty scary, but the network approved it." (Reportedly, Fox kiboshed plans for another ectoplasmic enemy of Batman's, the Gentleman Ghost.)



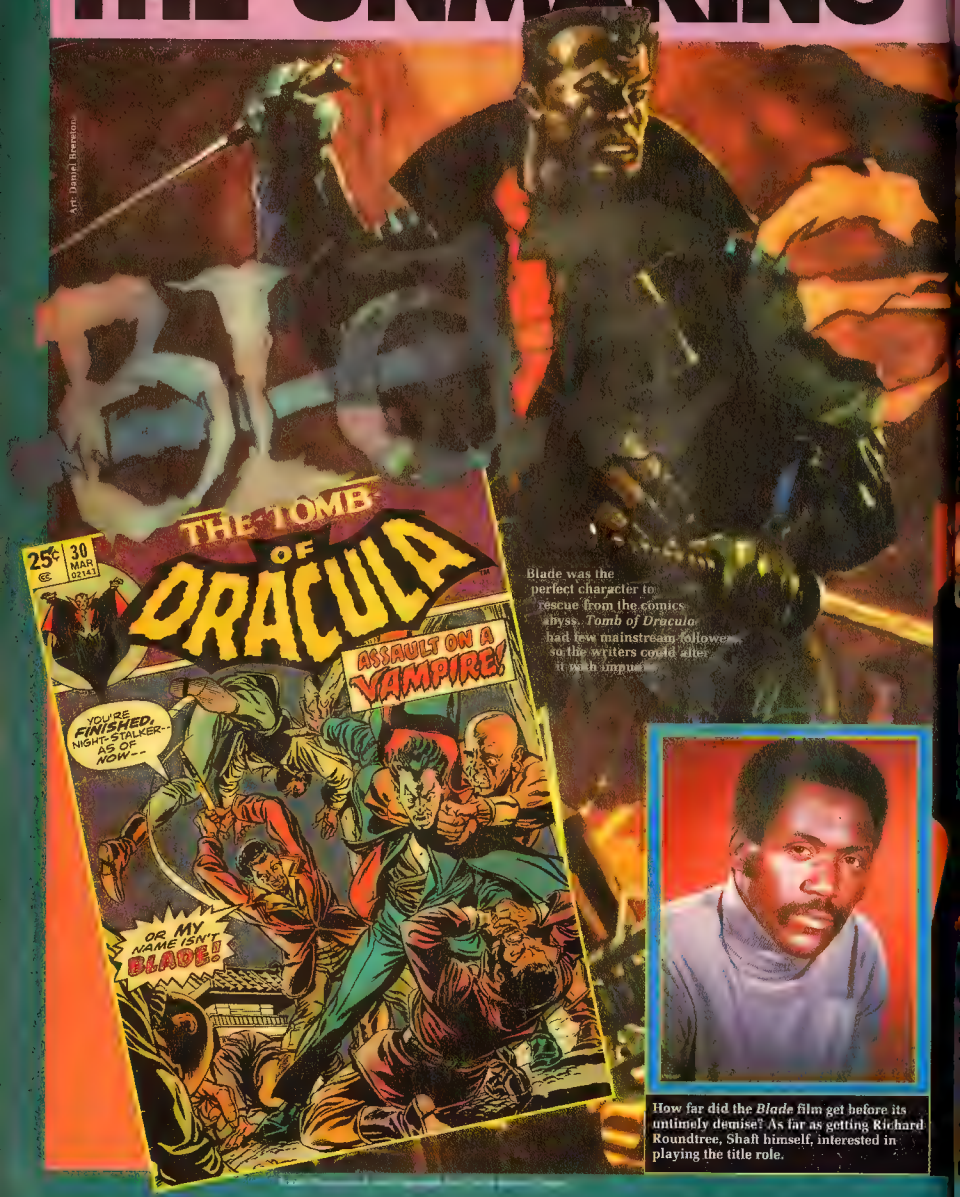
"Bruce tries to relax, but he can't control the bloodlust," recalls Timm of his plans for the abandoned episode. "Batman goes out to Gotham looking for victims."

Photo: Lisa Orris

"Monsters are great, because the network thinks of them as fantasy figures," says Timm. Unfortunately, Fox wouldn't let him bring Nocturna to cel life.

As for the Dark Knight's other fearsome foes, Timm feels, "Somebody like Clayface isn't really horrifying, he's just gross. He looks like a big walking pile of turds," Bruce Timm smiles. "Two-Face actually scared me, the first time he turned around and revealed himself. There's something about him that gives you a weird chill. It's pretty scary. Still," the producer sighs, "Nocturna would have made a *really* interesting story."

THE UNMAKING



Blade was the perfect character to rescue from the comics abyss. *Tomb of Dracula* had few mainstream followers, so the writers could alter it with impunity.

How far did the *Blade* film get before its untimely demise? As far as getting Richard Roundtree, Shaft himself, interested in playing the title role.

OF BLADE

Years ago, the vampire hunter almost made it into the movies.

By LEE GOLDBERG

This is the story of a comic book you may never have heard of and a movie that was never made.

So why are we even bothering to talk about it at all?

Because it might give you a glimpse into the way movies are made, or in most cases, *not* made. Writers call it "development hell," but the fact is, it's simply business. The mundane process is probably no different in the shoe industry than it is in movies. There are thousands of sneakers that never make it off the sketch pad.

In the late 1980s, cash-rich New World Pictures acquired Marvel Comics, and announced an ambitious plan to release a slate of big-budget movies and low-budget quickies based on Marvel characters.

I've *never* liked comic books, which I guess makes me an unlikely choice to adapt *Blade*, a somewhat obscure Marvel character, for New World. But we'll get to that later.

I was weaned on TV and detective novels, while my screenwriting partner William Rabkin grew up reading comic books and watching movies. Oddly enough, it was our completely different backgrounds that brought us both to New World Pictures early in our careers, and shortly before the studio acquired Marvel.

I had written a series of sleazy action/adventure novels in college called *.357 Vigilante*, under the pen name "Ian Ludlow." New World Pictures bought the books for the screen. I knew nothing about screenwriting, but my buddy Bill, then in the graduate film program at UCLA, did. Both Bill and I were covering the entertainment industry for various magazines (including STARLOG, FANGORIA, *Electronic Media* and *Newsweek*). At the time, Bill also worked as a freelance script analyst, reading screenplays and reviewing them for several studios, including New World. He was so tough on scripts, they used to call him "the assassin."

We teamed up to write the *.357 Vigilante* script, which was never produced. Shortly afterwards, we wrote a spec episode of *Spenser: For Hire* which, after a year of sitting on the producer's desk, was bought and shot in a matter of weeks. That led to a couple more *Spenser* episodes, and we suddenly found ourselves working as

professional screenwriters.

Around the same time, Bill was hired as special consultant to New World, working for executive Tony Randel, who would later become a feature director, but I'm getting ahead of myself. Bill's job was to slog through the Marvel Universe, looking for characters worthy of adaptation to the big screen.

Bill recommended a few, including *Longshot*, *Black Widow*, *Warriors Three* and *Elektra*. New World was interested in *Marada the She-Wolf* and *Ant Man*, and were anxious to reacquire *Spider-Man* and *Captain America* from Cannon and *Fantastic Four* from Neue Constantin. New World developed treatments for *Wolverine*, *Ant Man* and *Iron Man* among others, and commissioned scripts for *Heroes for Hire*, *SubMariner*, *Dr. Strange* (from Bob Gale, CS #1) and *Elektra: Assassin* (from Jim McBride).

Tony Randel liked Bill, and was impressed with his feel for the Marvel Universe, so he asked Bill to pick one of the "cheap ones" for himself to write, one of the "B" pictures that could be shot for $1.5 million in Argentina. Bill thought long and hard. He agonized. He sweated. Then, he picked *Blade*.

It just so happened that Blade, a character from Marv Wolfman's acclaimed *Tomb of Dracula*, was something he knew Tony was already interested in. So, Bill figured *Blade* had a much better chance of being made than anything else he might choose.

Was Bill being mercenary? Favoring politics over art to get what he wanted?

Absolutely.

But he was right. Tony gave us the assignment.

That's when we actually looked at the comic books.

Will there ever be a Blade movie? Seeing as New Line Cinema has their eyes on *Blade*, you might stake your life on it.

Action, attitude and armies of vampires—what more could you want in either a comic book or a movie?

Tomb of Dracula was written in the early '70s, and the comic stories were very dated. Blade was a black vampire hunter obviously created in the extreme heat of the "blaxploitation" movement. He was *Shaft* with wooden stakes, a "jive-ass dude" with a big afro and sunglasses who was obsessively pursuing Count Dracula.

This would *never* work.

We either had to reinvent the character ourselves or go back to the stacks of comics and pick something else.

Reinventing *Blade* would also mean giving the character more depth, more "levels" as actors like to say. Since we wouldn't be able to afford big stunts and FX on our budget, Blade would have to be compelling enough to hold the audience himself.

I honestly don't know whether it was Bill, or I, or the two of us together, but somehow we came up with the idea of combining Blade with another of Marv's *Tomb of Dracula* characters Hannibal King, a detective, who also happened to be a vampire. But Blade still needed an emotional core, a conflict that would drive the movie.

The nice thing about *Tomb of Dracula* was that very few moviegoers would know, or care, if we deviated completely from the comic book. It wasn't a visibly mainstream success, like *Spider-Man* or *The X-Men*, with legions of fans we could offend.

We had freedom.

So, we scuttled Dracula entirely. Blade would be chasing Tice, the sadistic vampire who killed Blade's family and left him for dead. Blade would sustain himself on blood stolen from the Red Cross, and on wild animals. The one thing he would never do was kill a human being for food.

Now we needed a story.

We all—Bill, myself and Tony—admired the Man With No Name Spaghetti Westerns starring Clint Eastwood (*A Fistful of Dollars*, *For a Few Dollars More* and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*). We felt that their kind of simple, symbolic storytelling not only fit within our budget constraints, but would serve the character we had envisioned.

So, we decided to do a modern-day Western, a story set in a decaying small town trapped in the Jet Age, that blip of time where every building, every car and every utensil looked ready to take flight into outer space. A town on the verge of liftoff that went nowhere.

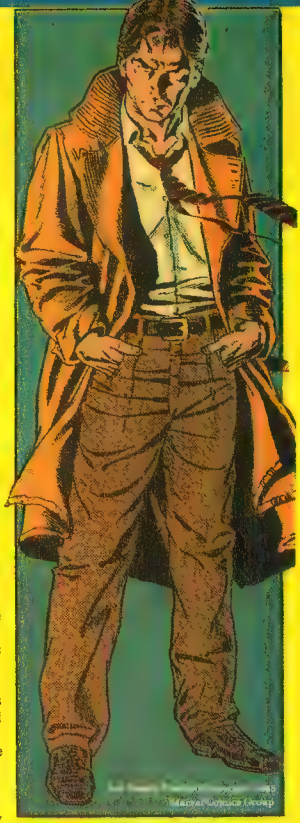
The cowardly townspeople had made a pact with a gypsy band of vampires who preyed upon them. The vampires could have the sick, the old and the weak if they would leave everyone else alone. In return, the townspeople wouldn't fight them.

And into this delicate balance comes a stranger, Blade. He plays the two sides against one another, forcing a confrontation that eventually pits him against his arch-enemy.

We wrote the script in about four weeks, and Tony loved it. He gave us some good, detailed notes, and we did a quick polish. Tony was one of those rare studio executives who didn't give notes just to have input—his notes were thoughtful, creative and genuinely helped the script. So many executives give notes on a scene without any thought to the impact they will have on the story as a whole. And often, notes have nothing to do with the aim of the script, and simply represent some passing fancy of the executive ("This would be a great place for a teen suicide" was a note one executive once gave us on a script. It didn't matter that the note would ruin the story, change the movie's tone and had nothing to do with anything). Tony understood the project, and his notes reflected that.

Tony was so enthusiastic about the final draft, he sent the script right over to Richard Roundtree who, ironically, was the star of *Shaft*, the very character on which the original Blade seemed modeled.

Meanwhile, some of the other New World executives weren't so wild about our script. It didn't help that almost all the other Marvel projects *weren't* panning out creatively, except for *Elektra: Assassin*, which was an incredible script that would have cost $30 million to produce.



Vampire detective Hannibal King, another *Tomb of Dracula* vet, was partially combined with Blade to create a stronger movie hero.

One executive in particular loathed our *Blade* script, and was aggressively pushing a jokey draft of *Heroes for Hire* instead—as a project for Hulk Hogan. The exec thought *Blade* was too weird, too moody and not mainstream enough. Nevertheless, the project inexplicably had momentary momentum—Roundtree was very interested and so was a director named Tom DiSimone.

Tom had recently done *Reform School Girls*, a women-in-prison movie for New World, which was so delighted with the film, they signed him to do *Angel III*. I was thrilled *any* director was interested, even one I had never heard of. But New World liked him a lot, which gave *Blade* another push.

We quickly snagged a videocassette of *Reform School Girls* and didn't see any of the style we thought *Blade* needed. But we were in no position to complain, so we didn't.

A lunch was arranged at a fancy restaurant between Roundtree, his agent, Tom, Tony, Bill and I to discuss the film. Roundtree was clearly very excited about the project, and his enthusiasm rubbed off on us. We were slapping each other on the back and looking forward to making the movie.

The next day, we were all dying.

Of food poisoning.

Bill, Roundtree and I had all ordered the same thing, and were puking our guts out. I spent three days with my head in the toilet, the sickest I had ever been in my entire life.

This was not a good sign.

The movie died soon thereafter. In fact, everything Marvel developed except *The Punisher* (CS #8, #9) died, and if there was a God, *The Punisher* would never have been made either.

The big reason *Blade* didn't get made was because Tony Randel's dream came true.

Tony was the studio executive in charge of Clive Barker's *Hellraiser*, and was offered the chance to direct its sequel. He had always wanted to direct, and this was his opportunity. We were thrilled for him. In the years since, Tony has continued to direct, even helming *Children of the Night*, a movie about a town of vampires opposed by a trio of heroes (Peter DeLuise, Ami Dolenz and Garrett Morris). The video hit was produced by the STARLOG GROUP's movie subsidiary, Fangoria Films. Anyhow, when Tony left New World, there was no one to fight for *Blade* anymore.

The script became a strong writing sample for us, and to this day, continues to get us work. In fact, *Blade* was one of the reasons we landed gigs as supervising producers on *She-Wolf of London*, a 1990 syndicated series from Universal (STARLOG #162). Oddly enough, *She-Wolf* almost sparked a *Blade* series.

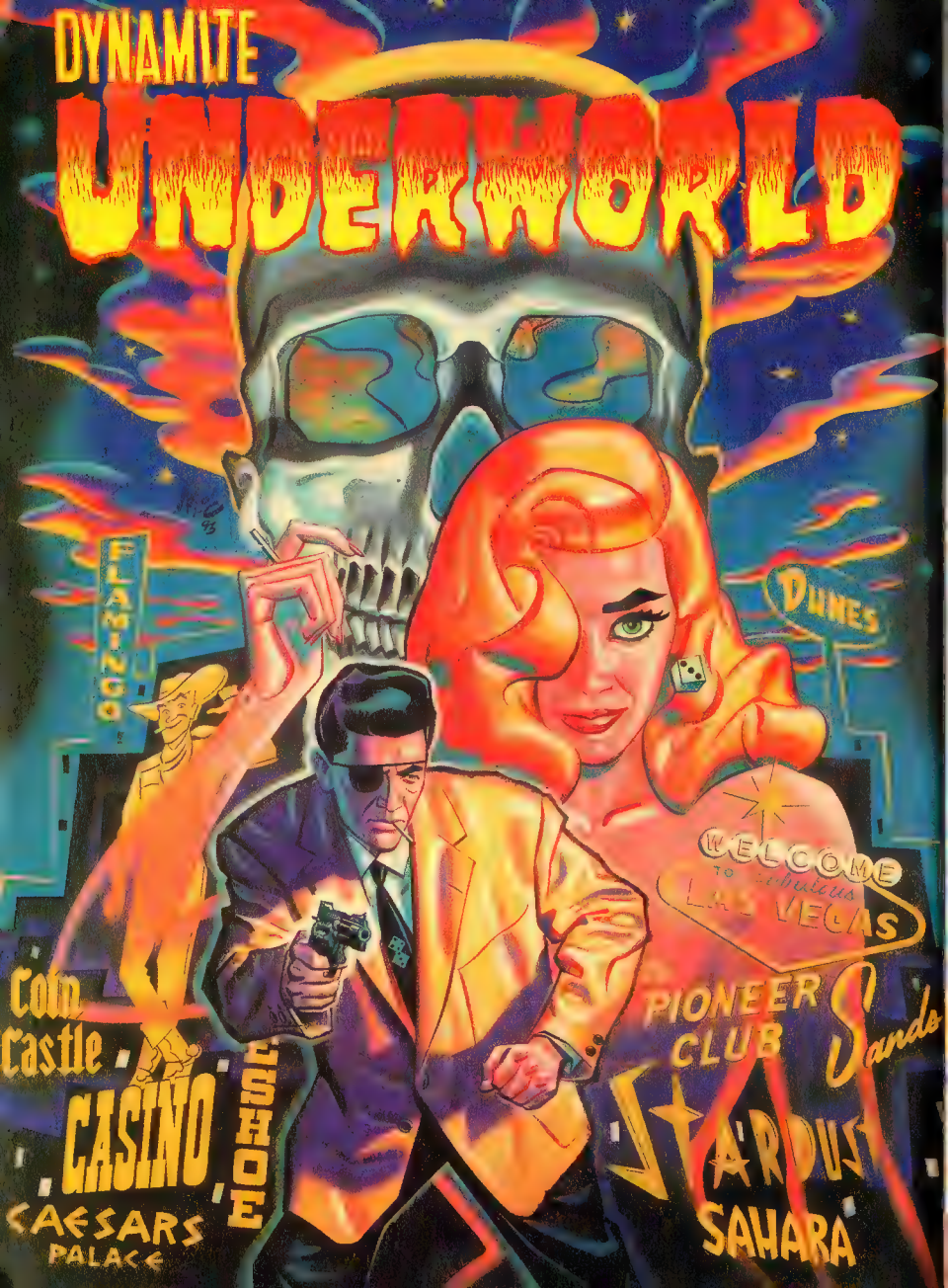
Universal's executives were pleased with what we were doing with *She-Wolf*, and so were the stations which aired the show. Towards the first season's end, we were asked to come up with a companion series, something supernatural but completely different from *She-Wolf*.

We suggested *Blade*.

The executives read the script and agreed. They began negotiations with Marvel and our agents. Then, they

(continued on page 60)

All Blade Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1994 Marvel Entertainment Group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All Dynamite Art: By & Courtesy Terry Beatty

How do you sell a '50s private dick to a '90s audience? Ask Terry Beatty and Max Allan Collins—who got Dark Horse to go for a *Johnny Dynamite* limited series with this drawing.

Can Johnny Dynamite crack the case of the zombie gangsters?

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

It's Mickey Spillane meets George Romero." That's artist Terry Beatty's description of his latest project with his longtime collaborator, detective novelist and comics writer Max Allan Collins.

Bowing in September, Dark Horse Comics' four-part mini-series *Johnny Dynamite* features an adventure called "Underworld," which starts out as a private eye yarn but soon takes a turn into the supernatural darkness.

"That will become more obvious as the series progresses," says Collins. "The body count in the last issue is impressive, to say the least. Them zombies pile up like kindlin'!

"A gangster sells his soul to the Devil and uses an army of zombies to take over the world, and his only opponent is a tough, Mike Hammer-style private eye. Of course, the real high-concept was to merge these two '50s genres, the hardboiled private eye and '50s icons like the Universal SF movies."

The idea of gangsters and zombies evolved because "I'm very pun-oriented, as Terry painfully knows," Collins admits. "The idea of doing a literal Underworld was what really sparked it for me. The idea of thugs as they're traditionally portrayed—in baggy suits in those 1950s gangster movies—it's one small step into zombiehood!"

Beatty traces his fascination with horror and monsters to TV and magazines: "I was weaned on *Famous Monsters of Filmland* magazine and *Chiller Theater*, which was on at about 10 p.m. Friday nights—it seemed like I was staying up until 4 a.m. when I was five years old to watch those old Universal horror movies, hosted by Dr. Igor."

"And I hope Dr. Igor gets into a national magazine!" adds Collins. "There was no horror host more off-the-wall than Dr. Igor in Moline, Illinois. He twisted both my mind and Terry's."

The team's best-known collaboration is undoubtedly *Ms. Tree* (CS #6), a

Collins and Beatty originally bought the rights to *Johnny Dynamite* to run as backup stories in *Ms. Tree*—little did they know where it would lead.

Art: Pete Morisi

Art: Mike's O'Connell/Courtesy Dark Horse

female detective title published by several companies, most recently DC Comics, which indirectly led to *Johnny Dynamite*. "*Ms. Tree* has been in limbo for a while, because DC isn't regularly publishing the book," says Beatty. "We wanted to do a project together. Of course, we're pretty much known for private eye material, but I was frankly a little bit burnt out doing that kind of stuff. We had done *Ms. Tree* for 12 years and I love the feature, though it didn't let me stretch much as a cartoonist. I have all these influences from superhero and horror comics that weren't allowed to come through in *Ms. Tree*, and we had been talking about doing something that tied into the shared interest that Al and I have in psychotronic, B-movie material.

"When we talked about doing *Johnny Dynamite* strictly as a private eye series, it didn't quite grab me," artist Beatty recalls. So, they added zombies.

When we talked about doing *Johnny Dynamite* strictly as a private eye series, it didn't quite grab me, but when Collins mentioned adding a supernatural element, my little brain started cooking."

"One of the attractions was that we could maintain our *Ms. Tree* private eye audience by going in that door with *Johnny Dynamite*, and by expanding the subject matter with this supernatural, psychotronic aspect, we could hope to also expand our readership to people who might not be into *Ms. Tree* per se, but do like horror, fantasy and science fiction. It's a way to hold on to our core audience and bring in some new folks," Collins notes.

The eerie ambience really isn't new. Collins and Beatty occasionally sprinkled elements of the supernatural throughout Ms. Tree's cases. "If people were paying attention, every now and then this aspect of Terry's and my mutual interest would pop up," Collins confesses. "We did a story about a guy in a mental hospital who had tales of UFOs. We took Ms. Tree literally to Hell, where she encountered not only demons, but virtually everybody she had killed."

Although Johnny Dynamite is a 1950s character, the mini-series is one geared for today's readers. "I don't think this story would have been published in the 1950s," says Collins. "It's not very linear. We begin with Johnny Dynamite, and then we have an entire issue from the point-of-view of the villain, in which he makes a literal deal with the Devil—and it goes from there! The narrative is just a little more sophisticated than you would have found in the 1950s. We're commenting on the '50s. It's retro in a sense, and I don't mean to say it's tongue-in-cheek, but I think there are constant references to pop culture icons of the 1950s that make it peculiarly a '90s book."

"If this were actually written and published in the 1950s, the cars in the background would just be ordinary cars for that time," Beatty says. "From my perspective, I'm drawing a funky 1950s car and going through catalogs and books for the niftiest car I can find to draw, so that readers with an interest in those things will think it's cool, in a way they might not if it were a standard generic car drawn in the background of a '50s comic."

Beatty admits he had to do some extensive research to make his drawings authentic to the era (including Collins' *Pocket Pin-Up* magazines used to research the writer's *Pocket Pin-Ups* and *Digest Dolls* trading card sets). "There was tons of research, but it was great fun," says the artist. "I had stacks of catalogs, some of them loaned to me by my partner here, and every shirt or appliance is out of those catalogs. Hopefully, we don't have any false notes in the book. That has been one of my complaints about some period pieces in comics—all it takes is one wrong element to blow the illusion."

"The body count in the last issue is impressive, to say the least," raves Collins. "Them zombies pile up like kindlin'!"

Dynamite Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1994 Max Collins & Terry Beatty

Collins' fascination with the hard-boiled detective genre, which grew into an award-winning career as a mystery writer, began when he was relatively young. "I never hear anybody else from my generation of mystery writers cop to this, but anybody who's roughly my age and writes private eye material is influenced by the wave of TV shows in the late '50s and early '60s, like *Peter Gunn* and *77 Sunset Strip*. They largely came out of Mickey Spillane. There was a *Mike Hammer* TV show around 1958, and that's really what led me to the books! I used to go down to the local newsstand and basically read the endings—everybody knew that at the end of *I, the Jury*, the girl took her clothes off! For me, it starts with Spillane and those TV shows," Collins declares. "*Johnny Dynamite* is a perfect reflection of that—he's operating at the time those shows were on the air."

Johnny Dynamite, the original comics series created by Pete Morisi, didn't actually have much influence on Collins and Beatty in *Ms. Tree*'s creation. "It's something we stumbled onto in comic collecting, after our bent had already been pretty well formed," says Collins.

"Although for me, seeing this other private eye comic book and seeing straightforward, clean line artwork there influenced me a bit," Beatty says.

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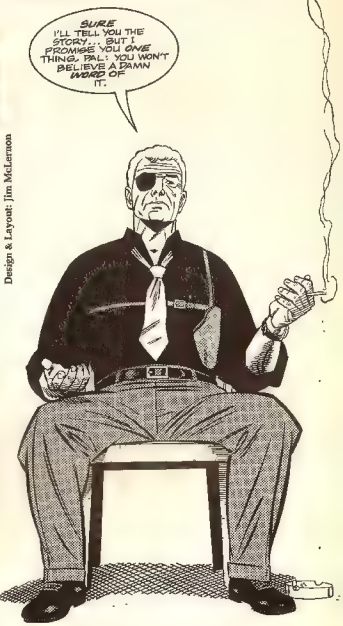
"A gangster [Freddie Faust] sells his soul to the Devil and uses an army of zombies to take over the world," explains writer Collins.

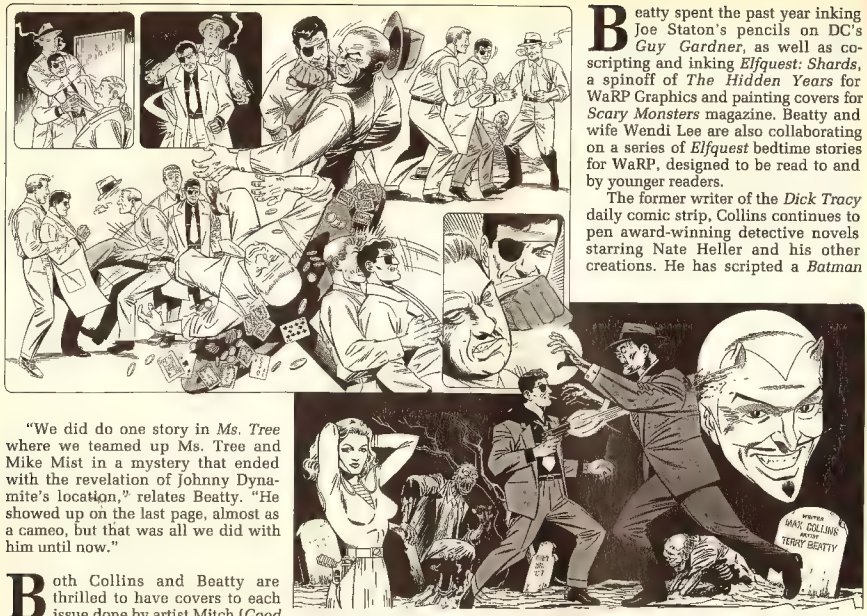
Design & Layout: Jim McLarnon



"Of course, I had already been influenced by straightforward, clean line artwork for years, so it's hard to say whether any of that directly made its way into *Ms. Tree*—although I'll admit to copping a few background drawing techniques from Morisi!"

Collins and Beatty bought the rights to *Johnny Dynamite* a few years ago, and began reprinting the original stories as back-up features in *Ms. Tree*. "That was a period where we were working so hard—as opposed to *now*, when we're working so hard—and we were doing a costumed hero comic book for DC, *Wild Dog*, at the same time we were doing *Ms. Tree* on a more or less regular basis," says Collins. "One of the ways we kept Terry alive was to take strain off him by reprinting *Johnny Dynamite* stories. When it was offered to us, we saw it as a way to save time and expose some great material to our readers. It almost didn't occur to us until after the fact that we actually owned the character and could do some stories about him ourselves!"

Everybody has a story to tell. Some stories are better than others, but when Johnny Dynamite sits down to tell you his, you better listen.



"Johnny Dynamite seemed like the perfect character to express what we had wanted to do for a long time," says Collins. "Something that merged the two genres."

"We did do one story in *Ms. Tree* where we teamed up Ms. Tree and Mike Mist in a mystery that ended with the revelation of Johnny Dynamite's location," relates Beatty. "He showed up on the last page, almost as a cameo, but that was all we did with him until now."

Both Collins and Beatty are thrilled to have covers to each issue done by artist Mitch (*Good Taste Gone Bad*) O'Connell. "Mitch and I have been friends for years," says Beatty. "I used to contribute to his fanzines back in the '70s, before we ever met. There actually was a time when I was a more advanced artist than Mitch! Mitch is the *only* artist younger than me to be an influence on me, and I'm thrilled to have his covers on the *Johnny Dynamite* books."

"It's going to provide a unifying factor," Collins notes. "Terry is a terrific cover artist, and we used to get great mail on our covers. Nevertheless, I can't think of anybody more appropriate to this series than Mitch. His covers set exactly the right tone. There's a slight tongue-in-cheek element to *Johnny Dynamite* that Mitch underscores in his covers, and he really enhances what we're doing. This is right up the alley of people who like Mike Allred, Dan Clowes or Charles Burns."

Collins is afraid that people will read the first issue of *Johnny Dynamite* and get the wrong impression. "One concern of mine is that this is a graphic novel published in four parts, and the first issue *seems* to be a hard-boiled detective story. Until the second issue, you don't know just how far off the deep end Terry and I have dived, and I want people to know that this is horror and supernatural and a great deal of fun, and not just think I'm doing my Spillane schtick again."

The team hadn't harbored a long-time ambition to do a *Johnny Dynamite* story, but the character was chosen to tell a story they both wanted to tell. "We are pretty imaginative and usually come up with our own characters," Collins says. "Johnny Dynamite just seemed like the perfect character to express what we *had* wanted to do for a long time, which is something that merged these two genres."

"I had resisted doing a *Johnny Dynamite* series that was just a straight detective book," Beatty interjects.

"Since I knew *Ms. Tree* was going to be tied up contractually for a while, that left us owning two private eyes, Mike Mist and Johnny Dynamite," Collins explains. "But, any time I would suggest to Terry that we run with one of them until *Ms. Tree* got untangled, he was less than enthusiastic!"

"I just wanted to go on and do something new and different," laughs Beatty. "I needed to stretch, and toss-ing those zombies into the mix really perked me up!"

"We spent about 10 years working with nobody but each other," explains Collins. "We've gone out of our way to maintain a partnership, yet each do other things."

Beatty spent the past year inking Joe Staton's pencils on DC's *Guy Gardner*, as well as co-scripting and inking *Elfquest: Shards*, a spinoff of *The Hidden Years* for WaRP Graphics and painting covers for *Scary Monsters* magazine. Beatty and wife Wendi Lee are also collaborating on a series of *Elfquest* bedtime stories for WaRP, designed to be read to and by younger readers.

The former writer of the *Dick Tracy* daily comic strip, Collins continues to pen award-winning detective novels starring Nate Heller and his other creations. He has scripted a *Batman* Elseworlds story in which the Dark Knight meets Elliot Ness, and is currently writing a 300-page project which he calls a 1930s gangster homage to *Lone Wolf and Cub*. Collins is also collaborating with Spillane on a project for Big Entertainment.

"It's a comic book/comic strip character called *Mike Danger*," explains Collins. "Mickey actually created *Mike Danger* in the 1940s, and he was the prototype for Mike Hammer. This is a version of *Mike Danger* that thrusts him from the early '50s into a politically correct future circa 2045. This is not unlike *Johnny Dynamite* in that I'm taking the tough, traditional private eye and cross-pollinating genres. It'll be a comic book, and at least a test-run of a comic strip that will appear in several East Coast newspapers."

This may not be the last *Johnny Dynamite* mini-series for Dark Horse, at least if Max Allan Collins and Terry Beatty have their way. They're already making plans. "If this is at all successful and Dark Horse invites us, we're very interested in doing another one," says the writer. "In fact, we have an idea in the hopper. All I feel prudent to say is that this is our horror *Johnny Dynamite*—the *next* one will be our *science fiction Johnny Dynamite*!"

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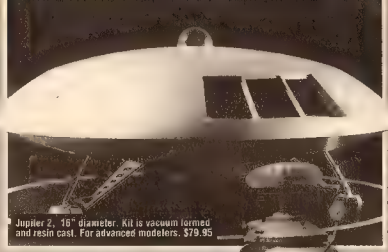

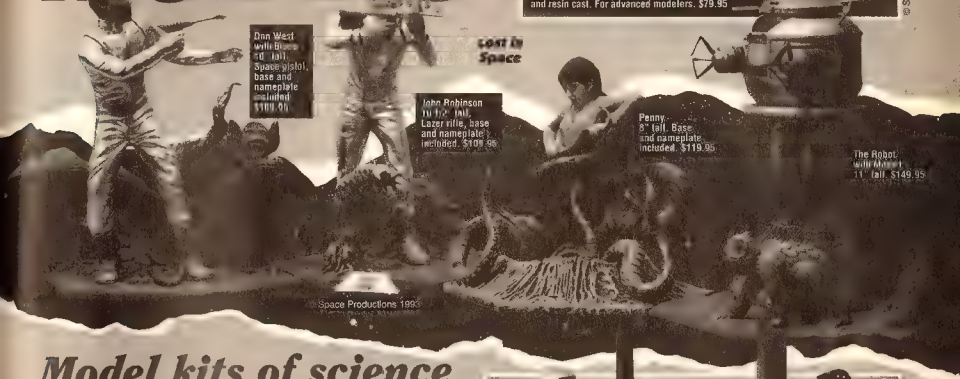
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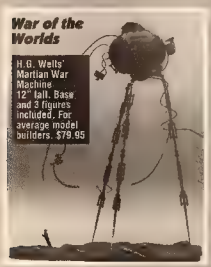

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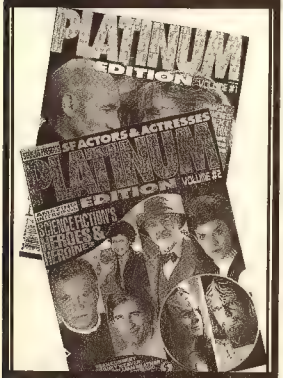

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Mask

(continued from page 37)

"I had storyboarded everything well in advance and we were restricted in the sense that we had rigid storyboards for FX that we had to adhere to," the director notes. "But we were still in a position of having a fast and loose set so that I wouldn't miss a joke or a moment that Jim or Richard [Jeni] would give me. The final film has improv lines all over it.

"We were shooting a scene on a park bench where the Mask is being romantic with this girl, and at a certain point the script called for him to offer her a cigarette. Jim had this terrific idea that he should blow her a smoke ring in the shape of a heart that floats around her head, close one nostril and shoot out a smoke arrow that pierces the heart. I immediately went to the ILM guys and said, 'We've got one that's not budgeted, but can we work it out?' We worked it out."

Photo: D. Michaels

Peter Riegert pounds the pavement as Lt. Kellaway, Edge City's bloodhound supreme. Think about it, how could you *not* find a guy with a big green head?

The director relates that *The Mask* has "physically been a *very* tough show. We're constantly doing sight gags and special FX and it all has to be very well-coordinated. We're doing a lot of stuff that's basically a morph between Jim and the computer images; like the scene where Jim sees his girl, does a full-on wolf howl and transforms into a wolf. That was tough."

And nobody knows better than Carrey. "Playing against the FX was definitely hard work," he confesses. "Sometimes it would take an hour-and-a-half to set up a shot because they were basically making it up as they went along. We were crossing our fingers on many things, and many scenes had to be shot over and over. And then there was *that mask*. Four hours to get it on and an hour to rip it off. I'm *still* picking green stuff off of me."

But there was the upside. "I like the idea of playing a modern version of Jekyll and Hyde, the Stanley and the anti-Stanley. Basically, I had to become a cartoon. I had to throw in dance moves and animate myself. The hard part was getting into the frustrated, romantic Stanley. Getting into the Mask required nothing more than putting on the makeup and running around. That's when I became this wacked-out Fred Astaire."

The comic actor does admit that the *Mask* shooting schedule proved to be an emotional rollercoaster for everybody involved.

"We did this one dance number on New York Avenue on the Warner Bros. lot. It was fantastic! I was out there doing this Fred Astaire/Gene Kelly thing, and everybody, cast and crew, was just going nuts because it was so great! But for a few days after that, when we would be doing a normal scene, everybody would just emotionally go into the toilet. Fortunately, with this film, there was always another adrenaline rush type of scene not too far around the corner."

And if the box office gods are kind, a *Mask* franchise is almost a certain bet. Dark Horse's Richardson, whose company is producing a comics movie adaptation, thinks a *Mask* hit is a sure thing. "I don't see this as a hard sell. The word of mouth will be incredible, just like it is with the comics." Carrey, likewise, feels there's a mask in his future. "I know there's a lot of stuff we can do with a second movie just based on the stuff we had to cut from the first one" (which he won't disclose).

"They make many films out of comics these days," Carrey continues, "but the Mask is a totally together, fun and unstoppable character. I think people would want to take a second and third look. I know I would be thrilled to play him again."

Russell sees a future in *The Mask* based largely on the fact that, because the character essentially rose from the comic book underground, it doesn't carry the baggage of more traditional counterparts. "The Mask isn't loaded like Batman, Superman or the Flash. He's an unorthodox character in a totally wacked-out world. There's a freedom here to do many different things."

However, Chuck Russell is ultimately a *Mask* man for more personal reasons. "You tend to get typed based on your past work. *The Mask* definitely won't type me for future projects. But the neat thing is that my nephews keep asking me when I'm going to make a movie they can see."

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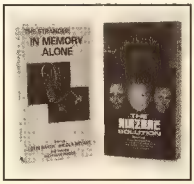

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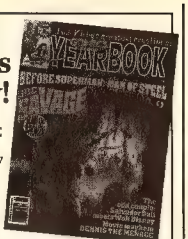

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Blade

(continued from page 51)

asked us to cut the script down to an hour and prepare a series premise to be pitched to the station executives at a big meeting at the Bel-Air Hotel.

We honed our pitch, broadening Blade's quest so he not only chased Tice, but encountered other supernatural forces as well. Blade would be a cursed man on a quest. It would be a far darker series than *She-Wolf*, sort of a supernatural twist on *The Fugitive* with Blade in the Inspector Gerard role. More importantly, it would be a single lead action show (meaning we could keep costs down), and it could be shot anywhere (meaning it would be attractive to foreign investors who would want the series lensed, in part, on their soil).

On the day of the pitch, we headed out to Bel-Air, nervous and excited at the same time. We were completely unprepared for what happened.

The Universal executives told us there had been an unexpected change in plans. The stations weren't interested in hearing about a dark supernatural series—they wanted to know how we were going to lighten up *She-Wolf* to save it from early cancellation. So, suddenly, and without preparation, we found ourselves pitching two series—a reconceived, lighter *She-Wolf* and *Blade*, a happy-go-lucky vampire hunter with a tremendous sense of humor.

She-Wolf survived, transformed into a light comedy called *Love & Curses*. But *Blade*, thankfully, was stillborn.

A film version of *Blade* was eventually made, but *not* from our script. It was an animated feature produced in Japan and later distributed around the world.

We've never seen it.

There has also been talk about New Line Cinema developing *Blade* for every black star from Wesley Snipes to Ice-T. We've sent them our script, but as of this writing, nothing has come of it.

Our *Blade* experience was by no means unique, and we certainly aren't bitter about it. We got paid, the check cleared, and we were treated well (we also became friends with Marv Wolfman, who's now one of my neighbors). And the fact is, more or less the same scenario has repeated itself several times on other projects we've been involved with. That's the business of Hollywood.

For one reason or another, not every screenplay commissioned by a studio gets made. Sometimes it's money. Sometimes it's politics.

And sometimes, you just never know. CS

Baldwin

(continued from page 25)

as a missed opportunity. There were so many things I wished I *could* have done. Like every movie, when it's over, you think, 'Good God, what I *could* have done.' "

Mention of *Beetlejuice*, which was directed by Burton and starred Michael Keaton, brings the conversation veering almost unavoidably back to *Batman*. While not signed for sequels, everyone connected with *The Shadow* is talking about the next movie, which rumor has it will pit Cranston against the Voodoo Master. Will The Shadow's return to the silver screen give birth to Shadowmania?

"I don't think anybody's ever going to have to worry about duplicating the kind of experience the people involved with *Batman* had," Baldwin says frankly. "That was really a phenomenon. They went in there and stomped the universe and got all of that attention. I don't think you're going to see that kind of thing again.

"I hope this movie is successful," he adds, "because I really do have a deeper appreciation of the character and I have so many great ideas for what we *could* do later on. I would love to do it again. It would be a pleasure."

Later, Baldwin is back on the floor of the throne room, where the earlier scene had left off. His hat and guns lie on the Oriental pattern floor. His scarf has fallen away, revealing not the predatory visage of The Shadow, but the handsome lineaments of Lamont Cranston. Thunder booms in the background and lightning flashes through the lattice of windows looking out on a night skyline as Cranston struggles to his elbows.

"Knife!" Mulcahy calls. And a stagehand approaches with a long rod. Affixed to the end is a Tibetan knife called a phurba.

The stagehand moves the rod phurba about to simulate a flying knife. Baldwin twists to avoid it. It goes for his throat each time. The knife seems to have a malevolent mind of its own. Then, Baldwin takes the ornate handle in his both hands, struggling to keep the point from his throat. A line of blood traces across his larynx. He's losing. Then, shifting tactics, he closes his eyes in deep concentration. Slowly, he lets go of the deadly blade. It hovers menacingly, but impotently, blocked by the occult power of The Shadow's mind.

His head snaps around, eyes growing spectral. Lighting flashes. The rod phurba is withdrawn. And Alec Baldwin laughs triumphantly.

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JLA

(continued from page 31)

known. If you have a franchise that's famous, that's what attracts attention. There are also other business reasons. When you have a show that's obviously going to cost a lot of money, because of FX, locations, plus a large ensemble cast, you can't afford to cast a bunch of well-known actors because they'll price you right out of a show."

In Hollywood, the budget isn't always considered when a writer sits at a word processor. He's concerned not with bucks, but with using his imagination to put an adventure on paper.

Flying superheroes in pajamas, metaphysical villains, sky battles, a flying blue "bug" and the destruction of New York City all contributed to frightening NBC from producing what Freilich believes is a $3 million telefilm or a $1 million per episode ongoing series.

"There are several stages in television writing," explains Freilich. "To a large degree, your goal is to sell your idea, up to the point that they order it to film. When they order it on paper, as they did, you're not restricted by budget. Nobody is asking you to demonstrate this on film. They just want to see what it reads like. If they buy it, you save the things that are the most essential in the rewrite process, the big pieces of production value, and you sacrifice some small things.

"For $3 million, which is a substantial amount of money to spend for a two-hour movie for television, we would have phenomenal FX."

Freilich's conception for an ongoing TV series of the *Justice League* would probably have the League's members take turns in the spotlight.

In the end, Freilich says that "if we had to do it over again, we would have eliminated the fantastic elements. What we tried to do is get the flavor of a *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, with a mystical, powerful evil out there. DC suggested that we make it a much more accessible, criminal type of story and that our guys would go out and find this criminal. That would have grounded it a bit more in reality.

"The assumption is the world has superheroes. Once you accept that, we realize, people can apply for a job as a superhero. We liked that idea. It was funny. That's why *Justice League* appeals to all of us, because they read like human characters."

But the Lords of Chaos were an inviting and never-before-seen villain that appealed to the screenwriters. "I think NBC wanted it to be more grounded in reality," Freilich admits. "I think they would have liked it if it was a Lex Luthor-type master criminal planning some huge bank heist and the Justice League got together and stopped him. David, Jay and I didn't want to do that because we've seen it before."

The other players in the game, at DC, loved their script. "Jenette Kahn thought it was a wonderful script," Freilich says. "The guys who do the *JLA* title asked us to write issues because they thought we wrote the characters so accurately. NBC, however, didn't know what they were buying. When they read it, they said, 'Well, this isn't what we wanted.'

"I pitched them the story; it took me an hour-and-a-half to tell it to them," remembers Jeff Freilich. "They loved it. They heard every word and asked not to leave out anything. They were laughing and loving every minute. When they read it, they said, 'Gee, this is awfully big...I don't understand this...that...' Guys! Did we have the *same* meeting?! I told you all this stuff, now you're reading it! We changed a few things. We added more on the kid, and they kept trying to make it more accessible."

The game of corporate politics, ultimately, is what killed the Justice League. CS

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Plastic Man

(continued from page 40)

movies like *Jurassic Park*. I like to think of it as further pushing technology's limits. Each time you do a movie, you spend tens of millions of dollars on that technology, and each time more money is put into it, the bigger and better it gets. It pushes us into the future."

Since *Plastic Man* took place in a fabulous, arty '40s environment, does he intend to do it as a period piece? "No, but I need to set it in a world full of curves and shapes," Spicer states. "I need an Art Deco world, because if it's a setting with square walls and everything's flat, that's not a really good place for Plastic Man to blend in and hide. If the world's curved and there's an Art Deco feel to the furniture, it gives you a theme of bending, stretching and twisting."

As for who would play the long arm of the law, the director notes that "We've talked to several people. I've talked with Jim Carrey [*The Mask* and the Riddler] a few times, and he's becoming a bigger and bigger star, so I hope we can get him. People like Tom Hanks would be good. Michael Keaton has already been used on *Batman*, but he would be good, too. We're really waiting on a script before we decide on who the right person is for this character."

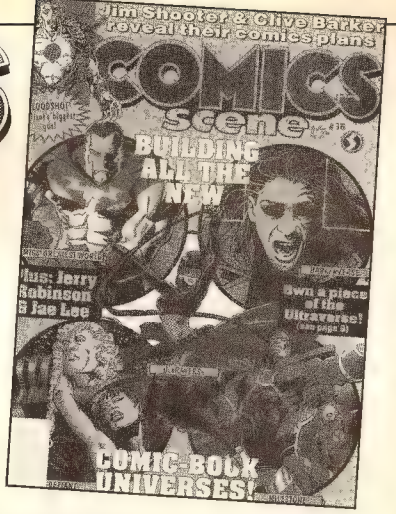
Early reports suggested that Paul (Pee-wee Herman) Reubens might wear the crimson costume. "That was true many years ago," Spicer smiles. Other names mentioned as *Plastic* possibilities include Willis, *Saturday Night Live*'s Phil Hartman, Liam Neeson and John (Q) de Lancie.

Spielberg, a longtime comics fan, has met with the young director. "He has a lot of comic-book projects—*Casper*, *the Friendly Ghost* [now filming], *The Flintstones* [in release] and *Zorro* [in development]. We've had meetings on *Plastic Man*," Spicer says happily. "He's very open to creative elements."

While he sees *Plastic Man* in his immediate future, Spicer does admit to having a couple of dream projects. "One is *Jonny Quest: The Movie*," he reveals. "The feature rights to *Jonny* have been sold to Richard [*Superman*] Donner's company and I would very much like to work with him on it."

As for his other dream project, Spicer leans forward and displays a *Jetsons* wristwatch. "*Jetsons: The Feature Movie*," he emphasizes to differentiate it from 1991's animated *Jetsons: The Movie*. "I have a very distinctive vision of what it could be and I think Jerry Seinfeld would make a great George Jetson!" CS

COMICS Scene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#36 Interviews: Clive Barker, Jim Shooter, Robinson 2. *Bloodshot. Comics' Greatest World. Ultraverse. Milestone.* **$7.**

#37 Interviews: Chris Claremont, Brandon Lee, Don Heck. *Avengers. Catwoman. Donna Matrix.* **$7.**

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#39 Interviews: Jeff Smith, Mike Barr. *Marvels. Legacy.* **$7.**

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#17 Director Cliff Bole, Marina Sirtis, Leonard Nimoy. Seven synopses (completing Season 4). **$7**.
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Punisher

(continued from page 44)

to show it.

"That's what I've done in this one. There are a couple of shots of people getting hit with bullets, but I don't really get sloppy with it. It is a violent book, but it's violent only because you know what's happening, not because you see it. It's violent in the mind, not on the page."

For Romita, most of the fun of *Punisher/Batman: Deadly Knights* was in handling the two title characters. "The Punisher is a kick-ass-and-take-names vigilante, Dirty Harry to the nth degree," he says. "No conscience—you got parking tickets, you die. Now, that's not right—he's a murdering vigilante. He has mostly killed people who deserve to be killed, but he's still a loose cannon. I wish I could be the Punisher for one night, I wish I could blow away a mugger or rapist—everybody has that sort of vicarious thought in their minds.

"Visually, he reminds me of those people I grew up with—he has that busted nose and those heavy eyebrows. He's a real New York character, and I'm a New York character, so it's nice drawing someone like that. Plus, it's a non-costume costume. This could be someone dressed up in a tight long-sleeve T-shirt with jeans, biker boots and weapons on his side. The Punisher *could* be real! He's not the average square-jawed, blond-haired, straight-nosed Caucasian character. He's a busted-up Vietnam vet from way back, strong as an ox, uses big guns and doesn't say a word. That's about it! If you're not on the right side of the law, you're scum. Visually, he could be a real character, he could be anybody. And that's the charge I get from the Punisher."

Punisher/Batman: Deadly Knights has also given the Marvel artist a new appreciation for one of DC's legendary characters. "Batman is fun because I've never drawn him before," John Romita, Jr. says. "As I did it, I realized why he's such a popular character among artists. He's a fun character to draw with that dark cape, pointy ears and no eyes. I never liked drawing capes, because they're such a cliché. The only cape I've ever done is on Storm of the *X-Men*, and that's a different type, a cloak that's attached to her.

"It's actually fun to draw the Batman cape because it gives you a dark background all the time. As an artist, I was able to frame the character much better and I could show some real moody shots, because I could cover him up with the cape. Once I started working on *Punisher/Batman*, I really enjoyed doing it, but I never expected to enjoy it this much!"

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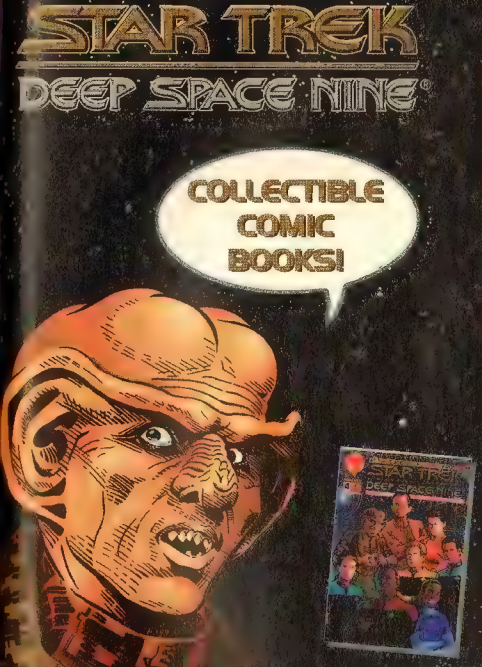

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Three regal actors bring a sense of royalty to the new Disney animated classic.

By IAN SPELLING

James Earl Jones provides the majestic roar of the king of the beasts, Mufasa.

VOICES OF THE LION KING

Though it wasn't exactly a matter of typecasting, it would be difficult to come up with a more perfect voice for the lion king of the African Pride Lands than James Earl Jones.

With his majestic baritone, Jones has graced countless commercials, served as the voice of CNN and brought Darth Vader to vivid, ominous life. Now, he gives voice to Mufasa, the graceful, powerful and loving father of Simba (Jonathan Taylor Thomas and Matthew Broderick) in Disney's latest animated epic, *The Lion King*.

Jones (profiled in STARLOG #128) believes that it was almost fated that he voice Mufasa, even noting that, according to his African spiritual totem, he is related to a lion. Another reason he agreed to participate in *The Lion King* was that he knew his young son Flynn would love the film and that the boy would get a kick out of hearing his dad's voice emanate from the lion king. Perhaps more importantly, Jones believed that the story's father-son relationship, in which a sage lion father tries to instill in his precocious cub son an understanding of responsibility and power before he dies, rings true.

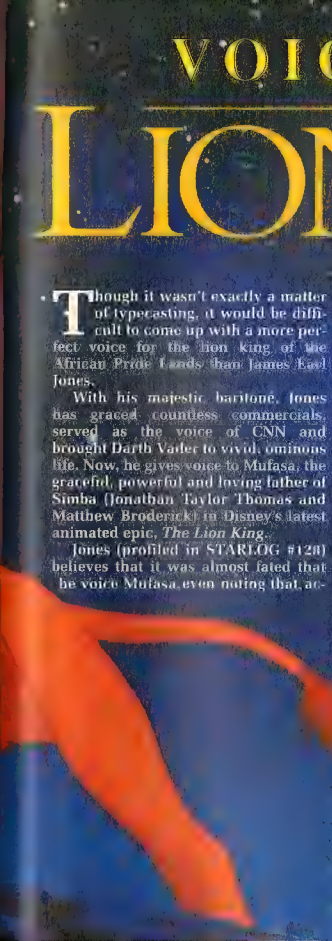
"It does, probably because Flynn is at the age [11] where he is about to be needing counsel from me," notes Jones. "The problem with the cub is that he has this great power, and he's too young to know how to use it. So he gets into some trouble, like any of today's royalty or those with power. They're very vulnerable because they have no guidelines and life doesn't give them any. Life just says, 'Full steam ahead.'"

In many ways, *The Lion King* takes more chances than some of its animated Disney predecessors. The voice cast choices offer Jones as the brother of the scheming Jeremy Irons (Scar) and the father of both Thomas and Broderick (as the young and older Simba), all in an African setting. Then, there's the matter of a hyena attack on Simba and Mufasa's violent demise, in which he is trampled to death by rampaging wildebeests. Not only does Scar plot the "accident," but he convinces Simba that it was actually his fault, causing the rightful heir to Mufasa's throne to flee in shame, and leaving Scar to rule the Pride Lands.

"The music is heavily derived from Africa, and the theme of 'Hakuna Matata' ['No worries' in Swahili] is really from African culture. That's all you're really concerned about," Jones argues. "It's not important at all that the actors be African-American. I'm no more African than Jeremy Irons is. I don't kid myself about it. You just have to accept it.

"As for the fearsome parts, they are acts of nature. Hyenas *do* feast on lion cubs and wildebeests do stampede. My wife says this movie might traumatize as many kids as Bambi did. But I think kids know that their fathers will die some day."

As much as James Earl Jones enjoys watching drawings come to life when matched with a voice, he particularly appreciates voiceover opportunities because he considers them another acting outlet in which he can exercise his talents. "It's a lot like what the Greek actors of ancient times did when they had their masks on," he explains. "You're much freer behind that mask to let your psyche emerge, or to let the psyche you've chosen for your character emerge. You're not self-conscious or embarrassed about how you look or any of that. That's exciting, and I would be more than happy to do it again."



Lion life is a light-hearted romp for Jonathan Taylor Thomas who speaks for the young Simba.

Design & Layout: Jim McLernon

Jones was happy to do *The Lion King*. He knew his real-life son, Flynn, would enjoy it.

Jonathan Taylor Thomas isn't just young Simba in *The Lion King*, he's Spot the Dog in the series of popular animated educational children's videos.

So, at age 12, Thomas is already a voiceover veteran. Perhaps even more interestingly, he's also an acting veteran, having finished his third season as Tim Allen's middle son Randy on *Home Improvement* and wrapped a role as the son of Chevy Chase's love interest in his first feature *Man 2 Man*.

Thomas, who's remarkably well-spoken and poised for his years, notes that traditional TV and film acting are extremely different from acting with one's voice. "When I'm on *Home Improvement*, I have a whole cast to relate to and, when I'm having a conversation with the other actors during a scene, I can respond to what they say and play off them," he explains. "With *The Lion King*, I was in a booth pretty much alone, with a mike in my face. I could talk to the directors [Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff], but when you're doing a scene, you must play not only your character but imagine the other characters, too. So, it's like a crossfire."

Was it an enjoyable experience?

"Oh yeah," he raves. "It was tough, but I love challenges, so I just went for it and had a great time."

Simba, in the early scenes of *The Lion King*, is a sweet-natured young lion cub who romps through life hardly noticing all that will someday be handed to him. After all, he's the son of the lion king and heir to the throne. However, Simba is too young to realize the realities of life, too young to know that parents die, uncles can be evil, and that what's beyond the safety of home is off limits for a reason. Dealing with Simba's more complex emotions was left up to Broderick as the voice of the older Simba. So, Thomas got most of the fun, light-hearted scenes, ones in which Simba wrestles with his friends and plays in the field with Mufasa.

"I pretty much put a lot of myself into the character," notes Thomas. "As they were describing Simba to me, I realized that all of these character traits sounded pretty familiar. He's a curious, real adventuresome, mischievous lion cub. He likes to have a good time and he's really fun. He also has a lady friend, Nala [Niketa Calame]. I don't have a girl friend at the moment, but I'm always looking around."

As for the film's more dramatic sequences, particularly Mufasa's death scene, Thomas believes people, children included, will be more moved than scared. "It's a horrible thing to have happen, for a child to see his father plummet to his death, and then believe it was his fault that it happened," Thomas says. "Unless you're an emotional vegetable, you're going to be moved by it."

Be a Disney animator for just one moment. You need a voice for the grown-up version of Simba. As the central character in *The Lion King*, he needs to be charming, boyish and silly for a while, then, after realizing that he must return to the African Pride Lands in order to assume his rightful place as the lion king, he'll need to project a more mature air.

Who out there could possibly bring together all of those elements?

How about Matthew Broderick? The star of such films as *WarGames*, *Ladyhawke*, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* and *Project X*, among others, seemed an ideal choice, and the creative forces

As the older Simba, Matthew Broderick voices a more responsible, grown-up, lion.

Thomas & Broderick Photos: Mike Ansell

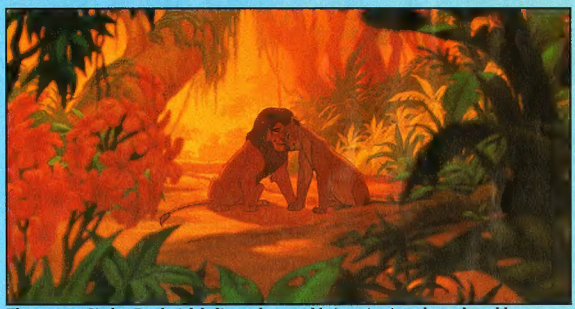
All Lion King Art & Photos: Copyright 1994 Walt Disney Pictures

Simba just can't wait to be king while Taylor Thomas can't wait to add the movie to his video collection.

behind *The Lion King* approached Broderick's agent about securing his services. That agent called Broderick, who jumped at the opportunity. "Who wouldn't want to be involved in something that could turn out to be the next Disney classic?" asks the actor.

Broderick (STARLOG #95) was then shown preliminary sketches and storyboards and told the basic plot of *The Lion King*. Over the course of two years, encompassing about a dozen voice sessions, Broderick sat before a microphone in an enclosed booth and breathed life into thousands of drawings that the film's animators had created. At one point, Broderick even performed his own musical numbers, but by the time the production had neared its conclusion, the Tim Rice-Elton John music had taken on more of a rock-and-roll sound. As a result, Joseph Williams was called in to provide Simba's singing voice.

Still, the Simba that moviegoers see on screen very much evokes Broderick. "I had a feeling for him," explains the actor. "He was much more cocky when we started. But, now the story is *Hamlet* a little bit. It was interesting, because Simba is younger than I am. He's a teenager who has trouble jumping into the real world. He's in a comfortable setting with the meerkat [voiced by Nathan Lane] and the warthog [Ernie Sabella]. He's pretty happy, but he's like someone in college who hasn't picked what he's going to do for a living. So, I really did think about that kind of lazy, scared quality for Simba."



The teenage Simba, Broderick believes, has trouble jumping into the real world—though he does find love with the proper lioness.

As often happens in animation, the artists incorporated elements of the actors providing the voices into their drawings. Broderick had been photographed and videotaped early on and, sure enough, some of his facial expressions and body movements made it into Simba. "Initially, I only saw stills, so when I finally saw the whole film put together and saw Simba moving around I was *impressed*," he reveals. "There are similarities between Simba and me, but I can't really put my finger on all of them. He does seem a little like me. He even moves like me a bit. You can probably see more of me in there than I can."

Unlike many of Disney's most recent animated efforts, *The Lion King* features several truly terrifying moments, including Mufasa's death and a sequence in which Simba is chased by three hungry hyenas, who look at him more as lunch than as their once and future king. Broderick explains that the film is no scarier than many of the children's stories he grew up with. "Many stories, like [those by] the Brothers Grimm, are violent and scary," he argues. "Whether or not they're good for children I don't know, but life is scary for children. So, I don't know what good could come from protecting them from the stories. But I see *The Lion King* and I think, 'Wow, *I* can barely take this. I hope a little kid can handle it when the father gets killed and the little lion is left there.' There could be a lot of crying."

And what does Matthew Broderick make of *The Lion King*?

"It's a really good movie all around," he enthuses. "I loved it. It was great."

COMICS screen

COMICS REPORTER

All of these upcoming projects are live-action unless specified. Those boxed are new or updated since last listing. **Not everything listed will ultimately ever be made.** S: script; D: director; P: producer; EP: executive producer; C: creator; AN: animated; LA: live-action; Syn: syndicated; HB: Hanna-Barbera; Nel: Nelvana; WD: Disney; WB: Warner Bros.; PP: Paramount; U: Universal; Col: Columbia; Am: Amblin; DH: Dark Horse; L: Largo; QDE: Quincy Davis Entertainment. **Attn. all pros:** Info to be added to this list is cheerfully invited. Send to COMICS SCENE, 475 Park Ave. South, 8th Flr., NY, NY 10016. (Info as of 6/12/94)

The Airtight Garage. AN. EP: Kurosawa Ent. P: Philippe Rivier. D: Moebius, Katsuhiro Otomo. S: Randy Lofficier.

Aladdin. AN series.

Alfred E. Neuman. Film. P: Steven Haft, QDE.

Alias. Film. U. S: David S. Goyer. P: P. Lenkov, S. Daniel.

Annie. Film. Rastar.

Archie. Film. DIC.

The Badger. Film/TV. PP.

Barbarella. Film. Nel.

❑ **Baby Huey.** AN. Syn TV. (see Animation Scene).

❑ **Batman Forever.** Sequel. D: Joel Schumacher. Two-Face: Tommy Lee Jones. Riddler: Jim Carrey. Robin: Chris O'Donnell.

Betty Boop. AN film. S: Jerry Rees. EP: R. Fleischer, R. Zanuck.

❑ **Blade.** Film. (see article)

Blankman. Film. Sony. August release.

Blondie. Film. WB.

Broom Hilda. Film. P: Ernest Chambers.

Casper. Film. Am/U. D: Brad Silberling. S: Sherri Stoner, Deanna Oliver. W/C. Ricci.

Catwoman. Film. WB. S: Dan Waters.

Concrete. Film. DH. S: Larry Wilson, Paul Chadwick.

Crying Freeman. Film. D: C. Gans. P: Brian Yuzna.

❑ **Daredevil.** Film. D: Chris Columbus.

Deadworld. Film. S: Mark Pavia (D), Jack O'Donnell (P).

Dr. Strange. Film. Savoy.

Doom's IV. Film. P/S: Rob Liefeld. Am.

Double Dragon. Film.

Dudley Do-Right. Film. U.

Elektra Assassin. Film.

❑ **Fantastic Four.** AN series. Genesis Ent. Film project in limbo. Fox.

Faust. Film. D: Stuart Gordon. S: David Quinn.

Felix the Cat. AN. Film Roman.

Ghost Rider. Film.

G.I. Joe. Film. P: Larry Kasanoff.

❑ **Gothik.** Film. P: Jeff Most.

Green Arrow. TV? CBS.

The Green Hornet. Film. U. Seeking director.

❑ **Hate.** AN Film. S: Peter Bagge. Colossal Pictures.

Incredible Hulk. Film. U. P: G.A. Hurd.

Inspector Gadget. Film. S: J. Loeb III, M. Weisman. U.

Iron Man. AN series. Genesis Ent. IM: Bob Hays.

Jonny Quest. AN & LA films.

❑ **Judge Dredd.** Film. W/Sylvester Stallone, Armand Assante, Diane Lane. S: Bill Wisher. D: Danny Cannon. Now shooting.

❑ **Machine.** Film. P: Larry Gordon. DH. U.

M.A.N.T.I.S. TV series. Fox. Fall.

❑ **The Mask.** Film. New Line. (see article).

❑ **Modesty Blaise.** Film. Miramax. P: Marcelo Anciano, Michael Berrow.

Pagemaster. AN/LA film. D: Joe Johnston. Fox/HB. X-Mas.

❑ **Peanuts.** Film. P/S: John Hughes. WB. Shooting summer.

❑ **Pit Bulls.** Film. P: Larry Gordon. DH. U.

❑ **Plastic Man.** Film. WB/Am. (see article)

Richie Rich. Film. P: Joel Silver, J. Davis. D: Don Petrie. W/Macaulay Culkin. Xmas.

Sgt. Rock. Film. P: Joel Silver. S/D: John Milius. WB.

❑ **The Shadow.** Film. W/Alec Baldwin. (see article).

Sheena. TV series. Col.

The Simpsons. AN series.

Sin City. S: Frank Miller.

Speed Racer. Film. D: Patrick Read Johnson. S: J.F. Lawton. WB.

Spider-Man. AN TV series. Fox. Spidey: C.D. Barnes. LA Film. S: Jim Cameron (D), Neil Ruttenberg. Summer '95.

Spy vs. Spy. Film. S: Gene Quintano. P: Steven Tisch, QDE.

Stealth Force. Film. Kandoo.

❑ **Street Fighter.** LA Film. S/D: Steven E. de Souza. W/Jean-Claude Van Damme, Raul Julia.

❑ **Terry & the Pirates.** TV series. (see item).

❑ **Time Cop.** Film. D: Peter Hyams. S: Mark Verheiden. DH/L. U. W/Jean-Claude Van Damme. September.

Trouble with Girls. Film. Fox. S: W. Jacobs, G. Jones.

V for Vendetta. Film. S: Hilary Henkin. D: Brett Leonard. P: Joel Silver.

Virus. Film. DH. S: Chuck Pfarrer. P: Gale Anne Hurd. U.

W.I.L.D. Cats. AN series. CBS.

❑ **X.** Film. P: Larry Gordon. DH. U.

X-Men. Film. Fox. P: Lauren Shuler-Donner. S: Andrew Kevin Walker.

Zen. Film. Shooting December.

❑ **Zorro.** Film. D: Mikael Salomon. TriStar. S: Terry Rossio, Ted Elliott. AN TV series. Imagination F. Calico.

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The *Fantastic Four* gets animated this fall, but film prospects are dim. As fans know, the Roger Corman live-action *Fantastic Four* (which was actually shot) has been shelved in favor of a bigger-budget 20th Century Fox version. And now, in turn, that Fox *FF* project is itself in limbo.

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Pirates' Progress

The status of the much-anticipated television version of Milton Caniff's *Terry and the Pirates* comic strip is, according to the series' co-producer Mace Neufeld, "in the works."

"We're still working on scripts," reports Neufeld, who's producing the series with Ben Melniker, Michael Uslan and Robert Rehme. "I've seen some of the completed scripts recently and they looked quite good. At this point, we don't know if the show will be a network or syndicated series or how many episodes we'll ultimately do. But I can guarantee you that the series *will* be made."

Neufeld, who produced this summer's *Beverly Hills Cop III* and *Clear and Present Danger*, claims that the original comic strip was "a favorite of mine when I was a kid." He also recalls the day that Melniker and Uslan (whose past film projects include *Batman* and *Swamp Thing*) walked into his life with the rights to the action-adventure comic strip.

"I had just come back from my first trip to Hong Kong, where I was promoting the opening of *Patriot Games*. I was fascinated with the area and, after reading about the pirates who had been in Hong Kong, I thought, 'What a great idea for an action series and what a setting for it.' In walked Ben and his partner with *Terry and the Pirates*."

Neufeld won't speculate on just who he would like to see cast in the series. But he's certain of one thing. "As a TV series, I'm convinced that *Terry and the Pirates* will work."

—*Marc Shapiro*

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